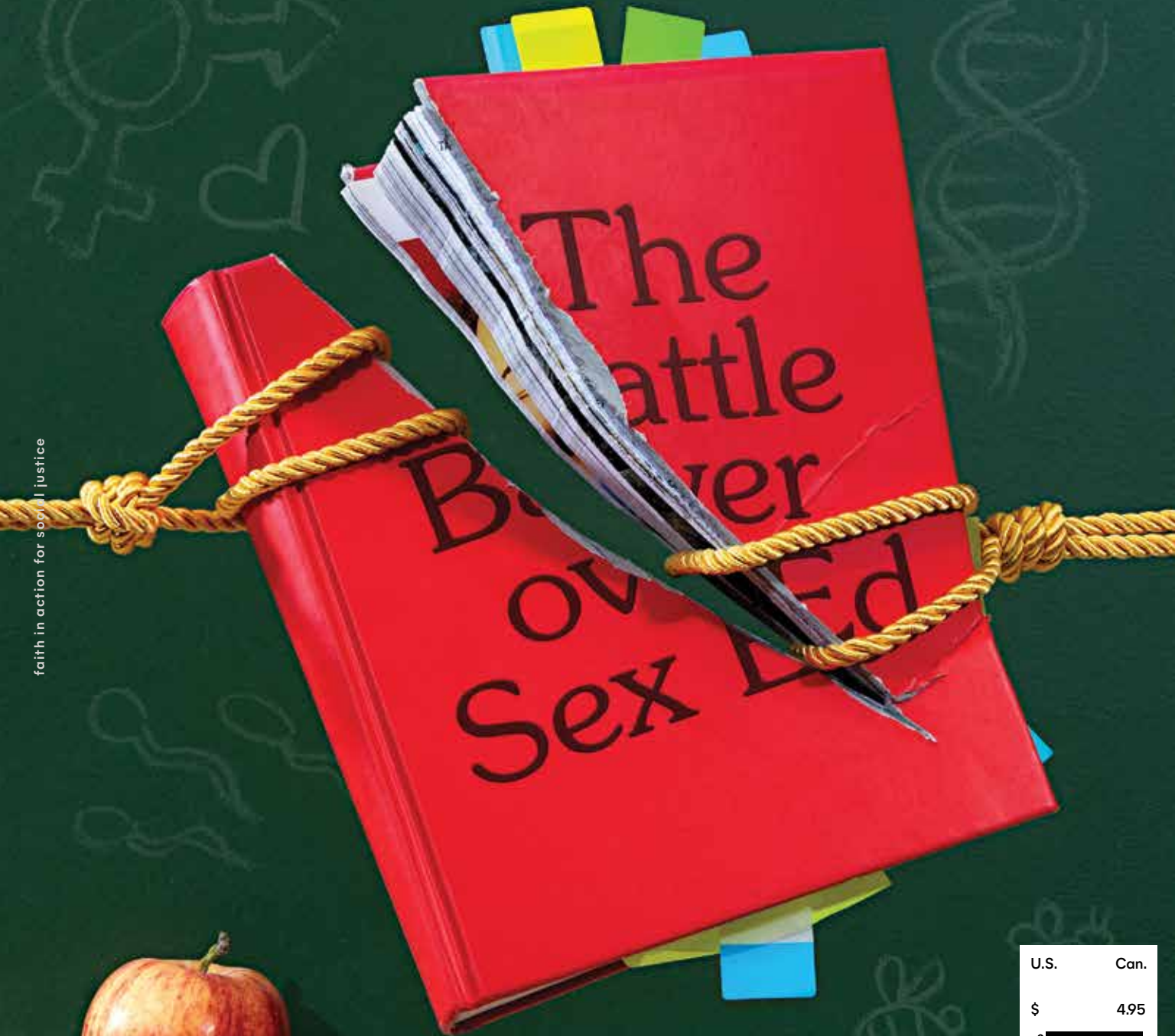


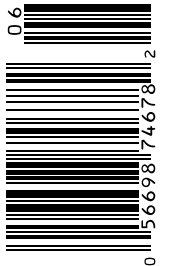
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Vol. 51 No. 6

Providing HOPE in Ukraine

The violence in Ukraine has taken such an extensive toll on hospitals and basic services that people now face worsening shortages of food, medicine and electricity. Within Ukraine and three bordering countries, Project HOPE emergency teams are **delivering medical supplies, care and other relief** for refugees and displaced children and families.

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James Buck for Project HOPE, 2022

"A LOT OF FOLKS IN MY GENERATION GOT SHAME-BASED SEX ED."

The Battle Over Sex Ed

While some Christians are leading culture-war skirmishes over sex education in schools, others work for a comprehensive approach that goes beyond silence or shame.

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'The Seed Fell into Good Soil' Seven years after the martyrdom of the Mother Emanuel Nine, we still need to heed the text they were studying that evening.

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The Healing Power of the Sun Indigenous nations find hope and solidarity in solar energy.

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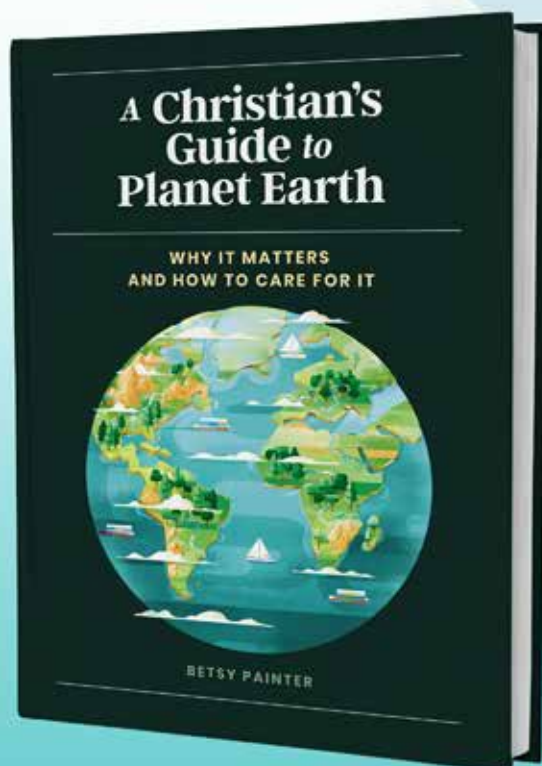
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From the Editor

On June 18, 2015, 350 leaders “committed to changing the world through faith and justice” came to Catholic University in Washington, D.C., for Sojourners’ annual gathering, The Summit. The planned sessions that day included “Criminalization of Blackness, Poverty, and Youth,” “Implicit Bias 2.0,” and “An Examination of Restorative and Transformative Justice Models.” As we gathered, we began to hear news of a horrible tragedy that had occurred the night before at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. We learned that nine church members were killed by a white supremacist during a Bible study. Our gathering became a time to hold one another in prayerful lamentation and shared grief.

As the seventh anniversary of that terrible evening approached, Rev. James Forbes, who served for almost two decades as senior pastor of New York’s Riverside Church, reflected on the scripture the group was studying that night, the parable of the sower from Mark 4. In this issue, Forbes imagines a conversation with the deadly visitor to that Bible study and wonders if any of the gospel message fell on fertile soil for the visitor that night—and, more important, for the rest of us.

RESPONSE

All People Fall Short

In “Where Honor Is Not Due” (April 2022), Heath W. Carter writes that the renaming of Princeton Theological Seminary’s chapel was essential “gospel work,” urgently needed “within but also beyond the ivory tower” of academia. Katherine Cartwright  supports the move away from naming buildings after people: “Why would you ever name a chapel for a founder or early professor of a seminary? ... There’s not a person alive who doesn’t sin and fall short in some way or who is not part of oppressive systems humans create and live by.” Kevin Kriess  agreed: “Name it for the community, place, or space.”

Write us: response@sojo.net



“People are poems, in themselves.”

LAYLI LONG SOLDIER

"IT'S NOT
TOO LATE
TO RETURN
TO OUR
COMMUNI-
TIES AND
EMPOWER
THEM."

Dana Tizya-Tramm
Chief of the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation

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Bekah McNeel

"Solutions journalism works really well with a hopeful and redemptive view of humanity," says freelance reporter Bekah McNeel (p. 22). "I'm not usually going in looking for a villain as much as I'm looking for where someone's view of what is good, true, and beautiful got twisted." Whether she is reporting a story, working on her forthcoming book, or spending time with her family, McNeel believes "it's about relating as human beings first" and "integrating that with the way we see God."



Iris M. Crawford

Journalist and graduate student Iris M. Crawford (p. 34) is "always exploring" the intersections of climate justice, culture, science, technology, and the African diaspora through her writing and research. Guided by the principles of movement journalism and Afrofuturism, she finds hope in "highlighting stories, people, [and] solutions that are making our world better."

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1913

The year Chicago became the first major U.S. city to formalize sex education in high schools

18

Number of U.S. states that require that sex education programs are medically accurate

75%

Decline in birth rate among U.S. teenagers (ages 15-19) between 1991 and 2020

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1

GRAIN OF SALT

BY JIM RICE

AGAINST THE ZEITGEIST

This spring, the Biden administration announced it was pursuing a military budget for next year that exceeds \$813 billion, an increase of \$31 billion over last year (which saw an increase of \$32.5 billion from the year before). Among the Pentagon's priorities, according to a Reuters report, is the expenditure of billions on new and upgraded (and nuclear-equipped) ballistic missile submarines, land-based missiles, and bombers. The Reuters reporter noted, "The budget would benefit the biggest U.S. defense contractors including Lockheed, Northrop Grumman Corp (NOC.N), and General Dynamics Corp." That it will. Whether it will benefit the rest of us is another matter altogether. As President Dwight Eisenhower put it in his warning about the growing influence of what he called the "military-industrial complex," these obscene levels of

**SHOULDN'T WE JUST
HOLD OUR TONGUES
AT A TIME LIKE THIS?**

“SOME CHRISTIANS WILL CONDEMN SUCH OBSCENITY, EVEN IF NO ONE LISTENS.”

military spending are “a theft from those who hunger and are not fed.”

But ... is now the time to raise questions about military spending, in the context of Putin’s brutal adventurism in Ukraine? Shouldn’t we just hold our tongues at a time like this, even if we are deeply concerned that such spending makes the United States, and the world, *less* secure? Even as we see our infrastructure crumble due to an alleged lack of resources, our schools struggle to reach a minimally acceptable level of support, and so many other domestic programs and activities (the kinds of things that build real security) suffer from insufficient funding—while Lockheed/Northrop et al. are doing quite well, thank you very much? Shouldn’t we remain silent, even as we see the Pentagon billions supporting not “defense” of the people of the U.S. but rather the projection of empire around the globe?

Strategic timing is a legitimate consideration in determining when to raise issues and push for change. Is there a realistic possibility of success? Is there a

groundswell of public support for a new direction that even a recalcitrant Congress can’t ignore? Fair questions, as we try to be effective advocates for a better world.

But sometimes timing is irrelevant.

We cannot and should not ignore moral questions, even (especially?) when it appears clear that the zeitgeist is not “ready” for those questions to be raised. Moral analysis does not wait for the correct, acceptable, poll-tested moment. History is replete with examples of movements that insisted and persisted in their efforts, even when the time was not “right” and the cause was “impossible.” From the civil rights movement in this country to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and in innumerable other cases, people put their bodies on the line and cried out for justice in the face of seemingly intractable opposition and overwhelming odds. It wasn’t a matter of logic, or of trying to be strategically savvy. Often, these movements arose out of the sense that “I could do no other.”

So, yes, the timing isn’t “right” to talk about the exorbitant and destructive U.S. military budget. And yes, military spending levels won’t be reduced in this budget, or anytime soon. But some Christians, followers of the Prince of Peace, will condemn such obscenity, even if no one listens. Sometimes faithfulness calls us to stand up and say: I must speak out; I can do no other. ✕



Jim Rice is editor of *Sojourners* magazine.

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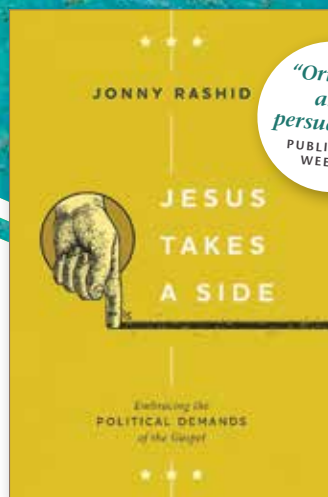
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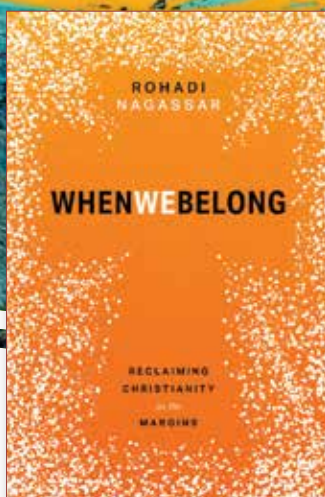
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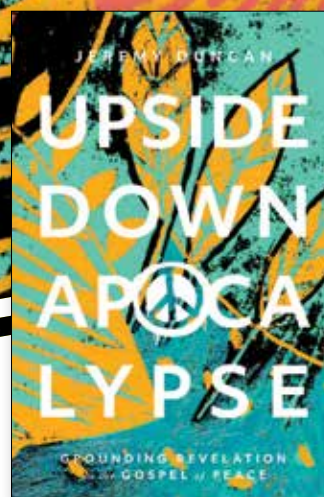
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‘CHRISTIANS ARE MEANT TO BE AGENTS OF HOPE’

Clergy play a vital role in encouraging congregants to see through conspiracy theories.



2

While QAnon, a convoluted conspiracy theory filling the internet with misinformation, is out of the headlines for now, we are still unpacking the damage it did to democratic principles during the 2020 presidential election. Social scientists such as ourselves have been unpacking the connection between religion and support for QAnon.

During the height of the 2020 presidential campaign, QAnon content increased by 71 percent on Twitter and 651 percent on Facebook, according to Marc-André Argentino, an associate fellow at the Global Network on Extremism and Technology. In a report released in May 2021 by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), 15 percent of Americans agreed with the sweeping QAnon allegation that “the government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.” The majority of Americans (82 percent) disagreed with the statement. Men and lower-income Americans were more supportive. To be clear, the vast majority of Americans (84 percent) have an unfavorable view of QAnon.

Nearly three-quarters say that QAnon is bad for the nation.

However, 23 percent of white evangelical Protestants, a core Republican Party constituent group, are QAnon believers, according to PRRI. The dangerous symmetry of political ideals between Republican talking points and QAnon may explain why Republicans are more likely (25 percent) than Democrats (9 percent) to identify as QAnon believers.

In 2020, Mark Fugitt, senior pastor of Round Grove Baptist Church in Miller, Mo., counted the conspiracy theories that people in his church were sharing on Facebook, including that George Floyd's murder was a fake; that masks can kill you and vaccines are part of a "deep state" conspiracy; that Democratic Party leaders are sexually trafficking and eating children. "You don't just see it once," Fugitt told Religion News Service. "If there's ever anything posted, you'll see it five to 10 times."

When dealing with similar activity in his church, Jeb Barr, pastor of First Baptist Church of Elm Mott, Tex., dissuaded his congregants from engaging with conspiracy theories. "Christians are meant to be agents of hope, to be peacemakers; the Bible says we're not to be quarrelsome," said Barr in the same interview. "We're not to be the ones spreading fear and division and anger." Barr taught critical thinking skills to his congregation and provided credible news sources.

While media reports talk about white evangelical Christians as a recruiting ground for conspiracy theory groups, most Christian clergy do *not* emphasize such ideas. Moreover, our analyses of Pew Research Center data from 2020 and 2021 provide considerable evidence that most individuals are more likely to challenge the conspiracy theories and QAnon ideas when they attend places of worship where clergy emphasize racial justice, democracy, and scientific reasoning. Of worship attendees who heard sermons supporting Black Lives Matter, 83 percent said QAnon is bad for the nation, according to Pew. Of those who heard preaching that identified Donald Trump's claims about election fraud as false, 64 percent held a "very unfavorable" view of QAnon.

QAnon continues to pose a threat to democratic processes and to public health. Ongoing economic uncertainty and polit-

BAPTIST CHURCHGOERS IN MISSOURI SHARED FACEBOOK POSTS THAT CLAIM DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADERS ARE SEXUALLY TRAFFICKING AND EATING CHILDREN.

ical polarization in the U.S. makes fertile ground for movements such as QAnon to emerge. That said, clergy and their pulpits have a critical role in encouraging Americans to think critically about conspiracy theories that damage our democracy and cloud our understanding that we are all created in God's image. ❧

R. Khari Brown is associate professor of sociology and **Ronald E. Brown** is associate professor of political science at Wayne State University in Detroit. They are co-authors of *Race and the Power of Sermons on American Politics*.

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SOJOURNERS

COMMENTARY

BY MARIA J. STEPHAN



STAND WITH UKRAINE— NONVIOLENTLY

Now is the time to increase investments in nonmilitary responses to violent conflict.

Vladimir Putin's brutal military intervention into Ukraine, and the Ukrainian people's courageous stand in defense of democracy, human rights, and human dignity, will go down as one of the most consequential events of the early 21st century. While we mourn the tragic loss of life and growing humanitarian crisis caused by Putin's invasion, the global community has an opportunity to double down on its support for civil resisters and peacebuilders in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus while massively increasing investment in nonmilitary approaches to challenging war and tyranny around the world, including in the United States.

Sadly, I'm quite familiar with Putin's authoritarian playbook. In 2001, I worked with a Russian human rights organization that focused on atrocities committed by Russian forces in Chechnya. At the U.S. State Department 11 years later, my work had turned to Syria when Putin

backed the Assad regime in dropping barrel bombs and using chemical weapons against the Syrian people. Putin's scorched-earth tactics and his willingness to target civilians are all too familiar, but no less despicable.

While there is now an interstate war between two sovereign countries and their militaries, what have been remarkable are the profound acts of nonviolent civil resistance led by unarmed civilians in Ukraine, in Russia, and elsewhere in the region. Ordinary people are displaying extraordinary courage while applying significant pressure on the Russian government aggressor using various forms of nonviolent direct action.

Ukrainians have been interposing themselves to stop the advance of Russian tanks and military supplies. Belarusian railway workers apparently have stopped Russian military trains heading into Ukraine by tearing up the tracks. Ukrainians have removed and altered road signs and digital traffic signs to confuse and demoralize Russian troops. In Berdiansk, hundreds of Ukrainians defied the presence of Russian troops by engaging in mass demonstrations to sing the Ukrainian national anthem and demand the troops withdraw. Thousands of citizens attempted to blockade the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (the largest nuclear power station in Europe) to prevent a Russian takeover. Ukrainians are refusing to show identification at newly established Russian military checkpoints and telling soldiers to leave. Orthodox priests in Ukraine have removed Russian Patriarch Kirill's name from the sacred liturgy. Priests are escorting convoys with food, water, and medicine.

"Civil resistance" is a method for actively prosecuting conflict involving nonviolent, nonmilitary means of direct action that include "acts of commission" (doing things the opponent does not want you to do), "acts of omission" (refraining from doing things the opponent expects), and a combination of both. The tactics we've seen, and other organized acts of civil disobedience and noncooperation, are used to strip power away from an opponent, making the opponent's ability to maintain control impossible, and to build up power and support for a movement.

In the case of the Russia-Ukraine war, we see civil resistance used to slow and thwart the military invasion and

aggression, as in the acts of nonviolent sabotage at the railways in Belarus and public demonstrations that slow or deter a Russian invasion and occupation. Another purpose is to hide and protect civilians and to mitigate violence, including by “nudging” armed actors through fraternization. Essentially, these tactics can buy time for people to escape the path of violence or get access to needed supplies and humanitarian support.

Civil resistance is also used to change the political calculation inside Ukraine, inside Russia importantly, and in the international court of public opinion. The protests inside Ukraine have sent the message that the Ukrainian people are united in their resistance to Russian aggression. The sanctions targeting Russian banks and the boycotts of Russian companies have imposed economic costs on enablers of Putin’s war, and global demonstrations have communicated a powerful message of solidarity with Ukraine and for democracy. Even during a hot war, civil resistance can deter *future* aggression. Organized civilian-based defense, which is a methodology for mass nonviolent noncooperation with a foreign occupier or aggressor, has already been integrated into the national defense strategy of Lithuania and other Baltic states that share a border with Russia.

In the struggle against authoritarianism—internationally and in the U.S.—nonviolent civil resistance has a strong track record historically. From research that Erica Chenoweth and I conducted, we know that nonviolent resistance campaigns have been effective in achieving their maximalist goals just over 50 percent of the time. Successful campaigns are those that involve large and diverse segments of a population, including youth, women, professionals, workers, business leaders, cultural figures, and religious actors. When diverse groups and pillars in the society refuse to go along with the status quo and engage in collective stubbornness through boycotts, strikes, and other forms of civil disobedience and noncooperation, this can impose costs on an opponent and translate into significant power shifts.

Inside Ukraine now, nearly every segment of Ukrainian society is engaged in some form of mass resistance and dissent.

Additionally, the pillars of support in Russia are important to examine, since the Russian people may be in the best position to stop Putin’s aggression. They have the most power and the most leverage, despite the ubiquity of Russian propaganda and misinformation and Putin’s masterful manipulation of historical grievances. Russian mothers, in particular, are a population that Putin may fear the most. Women have historically played a critical role in the success of civil resistance campaigns. Acts of defiance and noncooperation have outsized impact in diminishing the aggressor’s power and communicating dissent, such as the Russian state media editor who held up the sign during a live broadcast that said “No War.” Previous episodes of economically based civil resistance, such as the Russian truckers’ strike in 2015, could be harbingers of future organized dissent inside Russia.

Successful campaigns also have an expansive repertoire of nonviolent actions so they can be responsive to the dynamics of conflict and allow for lower-risk actions, which are particularly important in contexts marked by elevated levels of fear and mistrust. More than 15,000 people in Russia have been arrested in anti-war demonstrations, which have taken place

in hundreds of towns and cities across the country. When “acts of concentration,” such as large demonstrations, are targeted by police, then lower risk “acts of dispersion,” such as boycotts, work stoppages, overloading systems, and spreading anti-war symbols, can be amplified.

Defections by members of key pillars, particularly armed security forces and economic elites, have been a critical ingredient of successful civil resistance campaigns (as we saw in the Philippines, with entire military units defecting from the Marcos regime, and in South Africa as a result of the consumer boycott of white businesses to end apartheid). For defections to occur, soldiers, business leaders, and others must stop believing in their country’s leadership while at the same time being able to see a role for themselves in a future democratic country. It is not impossible to see more of this happening inside Russia as frustration with the war (and the resulting isolation) continues, and if an anti-war, pro-democracy movement takes root. Some members of the European Parliament are considering how to offer asylum to Russian deserters and defectors, which could accelerate defections.

Pope Francis has issued strong criticism against countries who see Russia’s attack on Ukraine as an opportunity to increase military spending, calling it “madness.” There are effective nonviolent, nonmilitary means of direct action for engaging violent conflict. And, as our research has found, there are effective ways for external actors, governmental and nongovernmental, to support civil resistance in ways that reinforce international human rights law. Now is the time for citizens around the world to press their governments and their religious congregations to significantly increase investments in nonmilitary approaches, including support for nonviolence, civil resistance, peacebuilding, and unarmed civilian protection. This would be a powerful way to stand with Ukraine while providing a solid bulwark against future tyranny and aggression. ✱

MORE THAN 15,000 PEOPLE IN RUSSIA HAVE BEEN ARRESTED IN ANTI-WAR DEMONSTRATIONS.

Maria J. Stephan, co-author (with Erica Chenoweth) of *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, is chief organizer of the Horizons Project, where she works to build a just, inclusive, and peaceful democracy in the U.S.

THE GREATEST DERELICTION OF DUTY

3



In perhaps the most honest prayer in the history of Christendom, a young Augustine (at this point far from a saint) asked the Lord to “make me chaste—but not yet.”

Timing is always the trouble—we put off till tomorrow what we know we should do today, and trouble results. In our lives, and also in our lives as nations and as a world. What is the tragic and hideous war in Ukraine but the result of changes left too long? For instance, we’ve known for many years that Putin’s regime was brutish and careening toward something truly ugly. There’s little doubt that his henchmen assassinated Russian dissidents in the streets outside the Kremlin and Russian exiles in the streets of Britain; they tried (and very nearly succeeded) to kill his main political opponent by poisoning his underwear. But there were luxury apartments to be sold to his apparatchiks (the British capital has been nicknamed Londongrad; Trump’s son boasted that “we have all the funding we need out of Russia”).

And, of course, we’d long known that we needed to do something about climate change—after all, the Arctic is melting, which seems like the kind of sign that doesn’t require much interpretation. But we’re used

**WE MUST TAKE EVIL SERIOUSLY
WHEN IT ARISES, NOT PUTTING IT
OFF IN THE HOPE THAT SOMEONE
ELSE WILL TAKE IT ON.**

to the world we live in; doing the work to change our lives was rarely a priority.

These two avoidances combined to power Putin. Remember, for instance, that the CEO of ExxonMobil (and eventually Trump's first secretary of state) Rex Tillerson literally accepted an "Order of Friendship" from the Russian dictator, long after it was clear what kind of man he was. ("Friendship" was defined as Exxon having heavily invested in the project of developing Russia's Arctic oil, a project only possible because we'd already melted most of the ice.)

So, Putin was able to invade Ukraine because he had a war machine paid for by oil and gas (literally—60 percent of the country's exports consist of hydrocarbons. Try to find something of Russian manufacture in your house). And he was able to cow Europe by threatening to turn off its gas supplies.

Now, belatedly, at enormous expense in lives (and in treasure), we are rallying ourselves to the tasks we should have undertaken long ago: converting Europe and perhaps America to renewable energy, shutting down the money pipeline that has made Putin's regime work. The people who paid the price for our delay are the ones sheltering in subway stations and pulling bodies from bombed hospitals; we must, sadly, pray that they will be the only ones, and that the whole world won't pay in a radioactive cloud.

We are at a place in world history—on a crowded, hair-trigger planet—where putting off clearly necessary tasks because they are hard is the greatest dereliction of duty. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" is reasonable advice only if we actually heed it, which means taking that evil seriously when it arises, not putting it off in the hope that someone else will take it on. ❦

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, is the author most recently of *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*

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DURING WAR, THE LAND WEEPS



Looking at images of bombed-out apartment blocks and plumes of black smoke rising across Ukraine, my thoughts turned to the land. While humans flee and seek shelter underground, the birches and oaks will go on standing in place, unfurling springtime leaves and hiding black grouse in their branches. Grasses will peep out their heads and earthworms will get to tunneling, some to be trampled by marching army boots and tanks.

Human wartime activities will belch out unthinkable amounts of polluting emissions, tipping the already-sliding climate scale further toward disaster. Bombs will destabilize industrial areas full of toxic waste, threatening air and water supplies. And still, the geese will return north and hiss over their fuzzy goslings. Saplings will reach for the sky and replace carbon dioxide with breathable oxygen. The Earth will go on living. And weeping.

“The creation all around us is waiting on tiptoe for Creator’s sons and daughters to be revealed in the full beauty of who he has created them to be,” writes Paul (Romans 8:19, First Nations Version). But for now, creation groans like a mother giving birth (verse 22). The contrast between what is meant to be, and what we see before us, is gut-wrenching.

**DESPITE ALL THE WAYS WE HAVE
NEGLECTED AND TERRORIZED THE
LAND, SHE STILL LOVES US AND
RISES UP TO CARE FOR US.**

But creation doesn't just wait around, doing nothing. Creation, following God's design, continues about her life-giving work, sprouting new growth even as humans scar the land and deal in death.

Onondaga Lake in New York, the sacred birthplace of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, was choked nearly to death by chalky white industrial sludge for more than a century. But scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer noticed that plants are returning. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer writes, "Plant people and human people are still here and are still meeting their responsibilities."

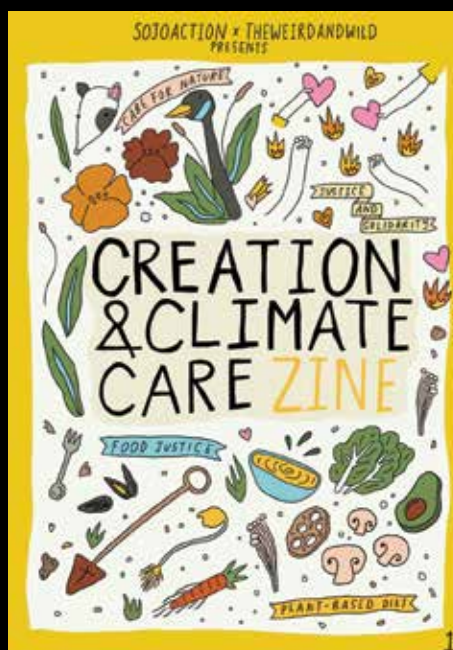
I could cry reading this simple observation. It brings up the same feeling I have when I notice dandelions and mugworts popping up after a long, harsh winter along the abandoned railroad tracks behind our house. Despite all the ways we have neglected and terrorized the land, she still loves us and rises up to care for us. While we traffic in war and extraction, Mother Earth goes on depositing seeds, enriching the air and waters, and incubating life.

The image of the land weeping comes from the title of a book called *The Earth Is Weeping* by historian Peter Cozzens, a detailed account of the Indian wars in the American West. Witnessing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we in the United States should have no illusions that we're above such atrocities. As a nation, we too have stolen, plundered, and laid waste to lands where other people belong. None of us are immune to war-making and brutality.

It's unclear in the end whether we humans will remain. But the land will be here. Living. Breathing. Weeping. ❖

Liuan Huska is a freelance journalist and author of *Hurting Yet Whole: Reconciling Body and Spirit in Chronic Pain and Illness*.

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EYEWITNESS

4

“WE’RE NOT JUST
CELEBRATING FOR
THE SAKE OF
CELEBRATION.”



OH FREEDOM!

Reedy Chapel was founded in 1848 and became a place for enslaved Africans to worship in dignity. On June 19, 1865, when federal troops came to Galveston to enforce emancipation, Reedy Chapel was one of the first places that announcement of freedom was made. We don't have the documentary evidence of this, but legend says that they nailed the announcement to the front door of the church.

Later, Reedy Chapel became the location of the first citywide celebration of emancipation. On Juneteenth, we reenact that first celebration. We march from the old Galveston courthouse to Reedy Chapel, ringing bells and passing out flyers saying, "All slaves are free!" It's a jubilant mood. We're singing "Before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave," we're holding hands, we're praising God. As we cross the main street, we hear the African drummers at the corner of the church, and they just revive us even more.

At the church, the Galveston Heritage Chorale sings these beautiful traditional songs. We read an abridged version of the Emancipation Proclamation. We give thanks in prayer. And we have an inspirational speaker talk about history or something related to Juneteenth so that we're not just celebrating for the sake of celebration, but we're also celebrating to make sure that the history lives on.

I'm descended from people who were enslaved in this country, and it would have taken quite a bit of faith in God for them to hold on until they were free. And they obviously did hold on, because I'm here. ✦

Sharon Batiste Gillins is a genealogist and member of Reedy Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Galveston, Texas. She spoke with Sojourners' Betsy Shirley.



The Battle Over Sex

While some Christians are leading the culture-war fight over sex education in schools, others work for a comprehensive approach that goes beyond silence or shame.



Battle er Ed

BY Bekah McNeel

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Party of One Studio





It means a lot to Jack Teter that Christians are getting involved in the fight for better sex education. “A lot of folks in my generation got shame-based sex ed,” said Teter, the regional director of government affairs for Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains. “So, it’s really cool to see these groups talking about the morals of consent, love, and communication.”

For Candace Woods, it’s a spiritual issue. Woods, who is in the ordination process with the United Church of Christ and a facilitator for the Our Whole Lives sex education curriculum developed by the UCC and the Unitarian Universalist Association, was brought up in so-called purity culture, and the most guidance she had from her church and community growing up was “Don’t have sex.” As a consequence, when she married a man 14 years her senior, she said that she “was very unprepared for a sexual relationship.”

As that relationship was ending in divorce, Woods encountered the Our Whole Lives curriculum through a UCC congregation. That curriculum, which is written for secular as well as faith-based education for kindergartners through adults, emphasizes self-worth, responsibility, sexual health, justice, and inclusivity—values Woods held

spiritually but until then had never heard applied to sexuality. “I found myself being incredibly healed by this work,” Woods told *Sojourners*, and as a result she has felt called to advocate for more kids to have access to curricula such as Our Whole Lives.

Woods joined others in advocating for Colorado’s HB19-1032, which made a minor adjustment to an existing law: It added teaching of consent as an “affirmative, unambiguous, voluntary, continuous, knowing agreement between all participants in each physical act within the course of a sexual encounter or interpersonal relationship.” Among those advocating for the bill was the Denver-based racial justice nonprofit Soul 2 Soul Sisters. According to Briana Simmons, who coordinates the “Black Women’s Healing, Health, and Joy” program for the organization, comprehensive sex education provides information that is vital to bodily autonomy, an important value in Womanist faith traditions, Christian and otherwise. “We can only make the best decision for ourselves if we have the most accurate and comprehensive information,” Simmons said. “At that point, we can consult with whomever we trust, be that a faith leader or a higher power, as we make those decisions for ourselves.”

The bill ultimately passed, but Colorado, like many states, has felt the push and pull between progressive and conservative political movements in the past year. After the racial reckonings of 2020, when millions of Americans participated in Black Lives Matter marches and online campaigns, 2021 saw a profusion of legislation proposed and passed to prevent schools from teaching about systemic racism. In many cases, sex education follows the same rhythm. Teter has seen pushback in the form of “bad faith” bills used mostly by conservative lawmakers to voice opposition to recent progress. For instance, one bill called for high-definition footage of a human embryo to be shown during sex education classes, ostensibly to discourage abortion. But such footage doesn’t exist, Teter said, and such “off-the-cuff bills” have little chance of going anywhere. On the whole, Teter said, comprehensive sex education is “in a good spot” in Colorado.

That’s not the case everywhere.

LOCAL COMMUNITY VALUES

In 2021, Alabama voted to change its sex education policy for the first time since it was written into the education code in 1973. The bill updated language for medical accuracy and removed the inaccurate description of homosexuality as illegal and “not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public.”

That kind of language—which stigmatizes queer identity—and claims about abstinence’s psychological health benefits are common in state education codes. And change has been slow: The federal government continues to fund abstinence-based education in 38 states, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research and policy organization focused on sexual and reproductive rights. What became the Title V Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) grant program for states and territories was established in 1996 to promote sex education that emphasizes abstinence as the preferred method of preventing teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. A second SRAE grant was established in 2016 to directly fund nonprofit and faith based-organizations that meet the criteria—the list of grantees includes many explicitly religious organizations and churches.

According to Guttmacher, the U.S. spends around \$110 million per year on SRAE programs, which address sex from a public health perspective, relating it to risky behaviors such as drugs and alcohol.

LEARNING ABOUT BOUNDARIES, CONSENT, AND ORIENTATION HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE PREPARE FOR SITUATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FUTURE.

With that framework, proponents of abstinence-only education maintain that while condoms and contraceptives might reduce risk, they do not avoid risk altogether.

The problem with this, comprehensive sex education advocates say, is that sexuality is a part of human life. Most teens encounter sex, even if they don't have sex themselves, and they all have a relationship to their own sexuality. Most teens (although not all) experience sexual attraction, and many have to decide how to respond to peers who are attracted to them. Learning about boundaries, consent, and orientation helps young people prepare for situations and relationships in the future.

Research also shows that abstinence-based education—whether it prioritizes abstinence alongside other forms of protection or promotes abstinence only—does not achieve the stated goals of reducing teen pregnancy or sexual activity among teenagers. The alternative, “comprehensive sex education,” begins with medically accurate language and alternatives to abstinence, but is a broad, ill-defined term. The Guttmacher Institute calls for a “rights-based approach to comprehensive sexuality education [that] seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality—physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships.” Comprehensive sex education, according to Guttmacher, “covers a broad range of issues relating to the physical, biological, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality. This approach recognizes and accepts all people as sexual beings and is concerned with more than just the prevention of disease or pregnancy.”

Even as state-level advocacy sees oc-

casional shifts, the degree to which individual students receive abstinence-based or comprehensive sex education may be determined closer to home. In some states, local oversight committees or councils composed of parents, educators, and clergy must approve sex ed material. Whether reviewing material for an entire district, one school, or even a single teacher, oversight committees are in place for the purpose of, as the Texas Department of State Health Services puts it, “ensuring that local community values are reflected in health education instruction.”

Ironically, this has created an opportunity for comprehensive sex education advocates, albeit a more piecemeal and uneven one. Where district leadership and parents are amenable, clergy such as Anna Taylor-McCants, outreach pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor, Mich., have worked to advance a more inclusive sex education curriculum. Taylor-McCants brought years of reproductive rights and LGBTQ advocacy with her when she moved to Michigan and agreed to serve as the requisite clergy member on the Sexual Health Education Advisory Committee for Ann Arbor Public Schools. It's a progressive district, she told *Sojourners*, and the committee has had no problem rejecting proposed curricula that do not acknowledge trans or nonbinary identities. But she's also trying to go back through previously adopted curricula to make sure it all meets current standards as comprehensive and inclusive.

At the same time, state law limits how far they can go on some topics. “I was fascinated to find out that you cannot even mention the word abortion in the classroom at all,” she said. For Taylor-McCants,

truly comprehensive sex education has to cover bodily autonomy throughout the reproductive process, and she feels that keeping health care information out of public schools is inherently racist and classist. “If we don't teach this very real thing, and your parents are skeptical of doctors, or you don't have a gynecologist ... you don't have access to the full spectrum of knowledge that wealthier kids would,” Taylor-McCants said.

But the right to determine what their children learn, and more importantly what they don't learn, is a constant battleground in U.S. education.

THE INTERTWINING OF SEX AND RACE

Virginia had been on a reliably blue streak when voters elected Republican Glenn Youngkin to the governor's office in 2021. Many say the election was lost when Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe said, in September 2021, “I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach.”

It wasn't sex education that drove a rift between McAuliffe and voters but weaponized use of the term “critical race theory.” However, McAuliffe's comments came amid a national furor over library books, spurred by activists, politicians, and conservative parents. The books many conservatives wanted banned included not only those from Black and Indigenous perspectives, but also young adult fiction with an LGBTQ point of view.

A month later, in Texas, Republican state representative (and then-candidate for state attorney general) Matt Krause sent a list to public school superintendents

with 850 titles he wanted to see stricken from school library shelves. Shortly after Krause's list came out, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (who also faced primary challengers) called for the removal of "pornographic and obscene material" from public school libraries. He cited growing concern of parents, but no specific examples of such material. In January, Abbott debuted his "Parental Bill of Rights," saying, "Parents will be restored to their rightful place as the preeminent decision-maker for their children."

In the meantime, Texas school librarians say they have seen more book challenges brought by parents in the 2021-22 school year than ever before. The most common targets: young adult fiction with queer and/or Black protagonists.

When it comes to issues they see as moral or ethical, it is natural for parents to want a voice in the decision-making, said Dartmouth historian of American religion Randall Balmer. "As someone who is a parent, I understand that to a degree. The world is a scary place." The problem arises, Balmer said, when one set of parents set their sights on a goal larger than their own kids. "We're not only going to protect our kids, we're going to change the whole system in our image," he said, explaining the thought process of many involved in school board battles over critical race theory, book banning, and sex education.

That "image," Black parents have pointed out, is race-specific. White parents' concern for the feelings of their children has prompted much of the backlash over critical race theory, ignoring the fact that the books and history they want to ban are those that accurately reflect the Black experience in America. Protecting their kids from the harsh realities of race in this country is not a privilege Black parents have had.

Privileging whiteness in schools has mobilized plenty of parents, but by linking issues of race and sex, Republicans are following an old playbook. In Balmer's 2021 book *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right*, he lays out how the abortion issue became, as he ironically puts it, "a godsend" for the Right. The issue of more immediate concern in the 1970s, he argues, was maintaining segregation and tax-exempt status for private evangelical "segregation academies" in the South after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Evangelicals could broaden their political coalition to include Catholics, however, if they led with opposition to abortion. With only two options at the ballot box, the sex vote bolstered the race vote.

The two issues, sex and race, have been intertwined even longer. Anti-miscegenation laws and the "one-drop rule" used institutional power to prevent sexual and thus genetic mingling of races, while those enforcing segregation outside the law often used the cultivated fear of Black sexual aggression against white women to justify lynching.

SEND IN THE ANGRY MOMS

In schools, this task of racialized protection fell to mothers. In the 2018 book *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy*, Western Carolina University historian Elizabeth Gillespie McRae drew a direct line between women's social role as caregivers and the task of keeping white supremacy embedded in public school curricula. "Employing a politicized formulation of motherhood, white segregationists across the ideological spectrum practiced a politics that emphasized performing whiteness as synonymous with 'good' womanhood, cultivating a politics that minimized their racial identity and privileged their identity as parents and mothers," McRae wrote. This included serving on the committees overseeing curricula.

In the early and mid-20th century, the most worrisome curriculum was history, where the teaching of the Civil War was given a heroic revisioning in the South. But building a nationwide conservative coalition would mean finding issues that



**"PARENTS SO OFTEN CAN'T
SEE PAST THEIR OWN KID.
RELIGION, FOR ME, IS CARING
FOR HUMANITY."**



would work to alarm those less interested in the myth of the Lost Cause. As the culture wars of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s raged, Christian conservatives such as Pat Robertson and Phyllis Schlafly included sex education—either abstinence-only or opposition to the topic entirely—in a list of topics parents should monitor to ensure that their children's public schools reinforced conservative Christian values.

Still today, where sex education has made headway, it has often come with strong controls for parents. The 2021 Alabama bill that updated language for sex education also carried a provision requiring schools, on request, to send sex education material home to parents for review. Parents are also included on local oversight committees like the ones in Michigan and Texas, many of which have curtailed references to LGBTQ inclusion.

But finding parents opposed to comprehensive sex education might be getting more difficult. Pundits have raised concerns about the “minority rule” of conservative

legislatures, with lawmakers playing to more and more conservative primary voters, who constitute a small percentage of the general population. In contrast, a 2018 national survey conducted by the consumer market research firm Growth for Knowledge at the behest of Planned Parenthood found overwhelming parental support for sex education—89 percent said it was “somewhat” or “very” important in middle school. Approval went up to 98 percent for high school. Of those surveyed, only 15 percent said they would support a curriculum encouraging young people to delay sex until marriage—a curious contrast to the elected officials pushing for conservative laws on these parents' behalf.

WHO IS SEX ED FOR?

The strong support for comprehensive sex education means that parents on oversight committees will likely be more like Tina Castellanos, a Texas parent who differentiates between the values she gives her kids

at home and what she thinks should be taught in public schools. Castellanos is a doula and breastfeeding consultant in San Antonio, where she raised her three children in the Catholic Church. She was a maternal and child health fellow at the University of Texas School of Public Health when she joined the school health advisory council in her children's school district, hoping to be a voice for evidence-based approaches to health education.

Castellanos was not the only person of faith on the council, and the debates were passionate, she said. In the end though, hearing from teachers left no doubt about the need for thorough and relevant resources. “We were able to hear what they were seeing, what kind of questions they were being asked,” Castellanos said. “If we don't provide a really well-balanced comprehensive program, those teachers are sort of left to figure it out.” The teachers couldn't just tell kids to ask their parents, she added. “It's about the kid who gets nothing. Who doesn't have a parent, or has a parent who isn't willing to talk about it. Or even the kid who is being abused and doesn't know how to describe it.”

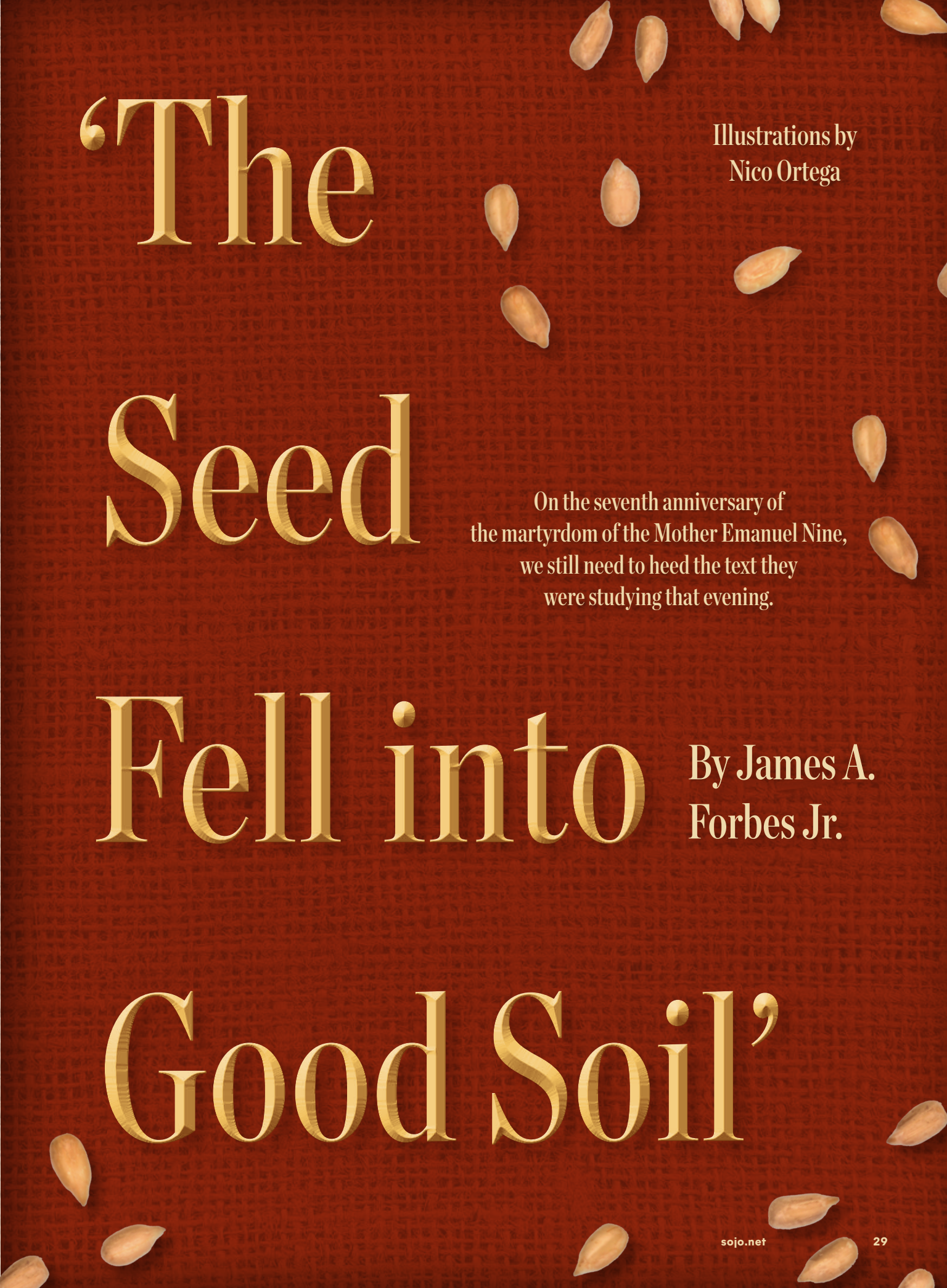
When Castellanos thinks about who sex education serves, she thinks about the teenage girls she meets through her work. Many of these young girls became pregnant not because they knew too much, Castellanos explained, but because they hadn't been given empowering information and tools in time. While some people might think of teen pregnancy as the terminus of the slippery slope, Castellanos said, it can get worse. “A lot of these really young girls who get pregnant become useful to guys who want to use them during their pregnancy. And many of these girls are ending up with STIs,” Castellanos said. “Those are things that somebody should have talked to them about.” As a Catholic, that “somebody” is communal, she emphasized. “That's what Catholicism has always been for me. I see it as this thing that we're doing for everyone in our community, not just everyone in our church.”

Like many parents, she knew what she planned to tell her children about sex, how she planned to instill values and ethics at home. But as she looked at the explanations and answers in the curriculum, she said, she wasn't thinking of her own kids, primarily.

“Parents so often can't see past their kid,” Castellanos said. “Religion, for me, is caring for humanity.” ♦

Bekah McNeel is a freelance journalist living in San Antonio who reports on education, immigration, and inequity.





Illustrations by
Nico Ortega

‘The Seed

On the seventh anniversary of
the martyrdom of the Mother Emanuel Nine,
we still need to heed the text they
were studying that evening.

Fell into

By James A.
Forbes Jr.

Good Soil’



I

I was invited to preach for the sixth commemoration of the martyrdom of the Mother Emanuel Nine on June 17, 2021. The service was held at St. Joseph AME Church in Durham, N.C., jointly sponsored by St. Paul's Lutheran Church of the same city.

After accepting the invitation, I began to do some research regarding the events of that tragic evening of June 17, 2015. After the group had gathered in the basement fellowship hall of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C., a young white man came in, and the class welcomed him and offered him a seat at one of the tables. Someone provided a Bible so that he could follow the study session. The Bible study leader for the evening was Myra Thompson. They were studying Mark 4, the parable of the sower.

[Jesus] began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"—Mark 4:2-9

The visitor that night listened attentively during the hour-long lesson. At the end of the session, everyone stood for closing prayer. The visitor took out his gun and began shooting. He told one of the participants that he was not going to shoot her so that she would be left to report what had happened. After the shooting

rampage, he turned the gun on himself but discovered that all his ammunition had been expended. He then ran out of the basement fellowship hall, got into his car, and sped away.

I studied the parable and prepared a sermon, which I titled, "What Kind of Soil Are You Determined to Be?" I was warmly complimented for my presentation and hoped that I had gotten to the heart of its message. It was such a powerful word that I wondered why it had not deterred the visitor from the murderous action he had taken that night in 2015.

He had hoped that his heinous action would foment another civil war. This would be his response to the white supremacist claim that Black people were taking over the country. In his mind, this would be just revenge for his claim that Black men were constantly raping white women. How could he not be convinced of the evil of his intent and change his mind as he experienced the kind of hospitality of the members of the Bible class and the gracious spirit of the pastor of the church and the parable of our Lord?

Then I recalled a verse from Isaiah 55:11: "... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Clearly the visitor did not have ears to hear what the Spirit was trying to say to him.

The parable had not succeeded in all it had purposed, but might there be broader intentions? Or extensions? Could the parable still be at work?

The parable had not succeeded in all it had purposed, but might there be broader intentions?

A Conversation with Our Nation about Race

Is it true that an idea that's not true
Has enslaved many minds
Causing them to see
themselves as superior
and others
as inferiors?

This untruth creeps in almost everywhere.
Indignities thrust upon residents of reservations
cruelty to brown children in border pens,
Black codes in the public square
corporate boardroom banter
when no one is paying attention.

Is the concept of race a mythic, microbic germ-like virus
that invades subliminally?

Is it an ideology that attaches itself to people of
similar attitudes and hues
and
bribes them with irresistible benefits
in exchange for conscience-less loyalty?

No one recalls when it first began its vocation of domination
or
When it was too late to say "count me out"
because
By then, it had become officially "just how it is."

Whatever it is, it produces
falsehoods and fears
denials and guilt
regrets and remorse
resentment and hate.

This xenophobic monstrosity brings
mayhem
mischief
murder
and
brutality

When seduced by race character is flawed.
Some teach their children to embrace the fraud.
Delusions spread; prejudice gets stronger
Trusting relationships are NO LONGER!

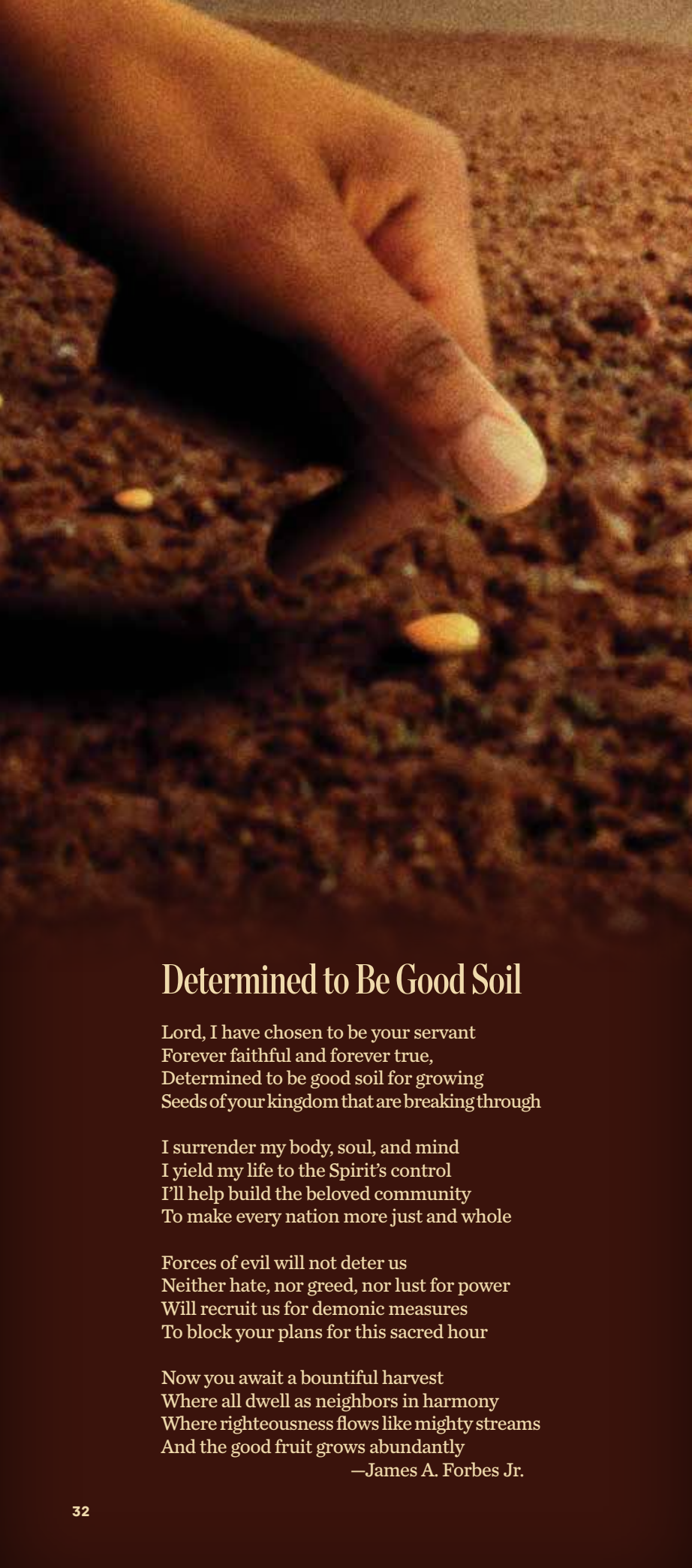
Now it's high time to come to our senses.
God's grace will pardon all past offenses.
Repent, repair, resolve to make amends
For racism and all its violent sins.

Sharing their power, privilege, and pride
For some may feel like suicide.
But rather than risk eternal disgrace
Put truth, justice and kindness in place.
An instinctual sense of morality
Says when Black lives matter, all can breathe free.
The human family must protect this right
Making our world more beautiful and bright.

Lord, give us the courage to face what's real.
To take the steps your love will reveal.
Heal our brokenness and our bigotry.
Make us a nation more pleasing to thee.

—James A. Forbes Jr.





Determined to Be Good Soil

Lord, I have chosen to be your servant
Forever faithful and forever true,
Determined to be good soil for growing
Seeds of your kingdom that are breaking through

I surrender my body, soul, and mind
I yield my life to the Spirit's control
I'll help build the beloved community
To make every nation more just and whole

Forces of evil will not deter us
Neither hate, nor greed, nor lust for power
Will recruit us for demonic measures
To block your plans for this sacred hour

Now you await a bountiful harvest
Where all dwell as neighbors in harmony
Where righteousness flows like mighty streams
And the good fruit grows abundantly

—James A. Forbes Jr.

I would like to know
if the parable he heard
that night at Mother
Emanuel had brought
him to the point
of remorse.

WHAT I WOULD ASK THE SHOOTER

Considering such questions, I developed an intense longing to visit the shooter in federal prison in Terre Haute, Ind. I would like to raise certain questions with him: How do you feel about the fact that divine providence allowed you to run out of ammunition before you turned your gun on yourself? How does the rape of Black slaves over the centuries compare with the occasional assault of white women by men of color? Would it change your mind if it were discovered that more Black women were victims of sexual assault by whites than the other way around? Should whites be exonerated for their brutalities against people of color during slavery and beyond?

What if it became clear that all people are the same in the sight of God and that attitudes about racial differences are deceptive and illusory? I would like to share my poem "A Conversation with Our Nation about Race" with him and to have him share his thoughts about it. At the end of such an exchange, I would like to know if the parable he heard that night at Mother Emanuel had brought him to the point of regret or remorse. Had he even heard anything like that in his Lutheran church? Maybe the parable was still at work in his heart and mind.

I would like also to know how he felt about the willingness of members of the victims' families to forgive him although he had not expressed a desire for their forgiveness. Did he discuss his racist views with others in the prison or his family? Or were his attitudes shamefully private, only to be shared with the in-group of internet compatriots?

After this length of time of incarceration, has his thinking changed? The shooter acknowledged that after listening to the parable in the Bible study, he felt that if he did not follow through on his plan that night, he would not be able to do it. The parable created a moral spiritual dilemma for him—would he serve the cause of white supremacist hatred, or would he respond to the calling of truth, justice, and compassion?

A MORAL SPIRITUAL DILEMMA

Today, as we approach the seventh anniversary of the martyrdom of the Mother Emanuel Nine, all Americans are facing the same moral spiritual dilemma that young man was struggling with that night. Because Jesus' parable of the sower has not yet completely fulfilled its purpose, let us encourage preachers around the country of all faith traditions to preach sermons prepared from Mark 4:1-9 or similar themes from other sacred scriptures as brought out in "Determined to Be Good Soil." Can you imagine the impact of a nationwide Bible study, in effect, focused on Jesus' teachings about gospel seeds falling on good soil?

It may be helpful in preparing for such a study to review two books written by family members of Mother Emanuel victims. The first book is *For Such a Time as This: Hope and Forgiveness after the Charleston Massacre*, by Rev. Sharon Risher, and the second, written by Rev. Anthony B. Thompson, is titled *Called to Forgive*. Each of these books review the details surrounding those horrible events, and we also see God's grace at work calling people to the wisdom of Romans 12:21: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

What a powerful challenge God arranged for the visitor to hear that night! If only his heart and mind were open to hear the voice of God, the world would have become a different place. As we hear the parable for ourselves, will we resolve to say yes to the gospel mandate and heed the prophetic admonitions? "When we all see we are one family / Life will be so much better for all ... The blood in our veins should be crying / With their blood that's still crying today." ❖

James A. Forbes Jr. served for 18 years as senior pastor of Riverside Church in New York City.

The Sound Out of the Ground

Cain murdered and buried his brother
No one knew Abel's blood had been shed
Out of the ground came a mournful sound
Abel's blood cried out in his stead

Our precious children of Newtown
Ask us all for this one sacrifice
Grieve our demise with your eyes on the prize
Save the children, our blood paid the price

Young brother and sister died asking
Must we fall so that others seem tall
When we all see, we are one family
Life will be so much better for all

What is that sound coming out from the ground
It's the blood of God's fallen children
The blood in our veins should be crying
With their blood that's still crying today
Rise above fear, speak out loud and clear
For our children, put weapons away

What is the sound coming out of the ground

It's the blood of God's fallen children
What is their crying trying to say
We've got to stop this senseless killing
We've got to stop this senseless killing
We've got to stop this senseless killing
We've got to stop this senseless killing

What is their crying trying to say
We've got to stop this senseless killing
We've got to stop this senseless killing
—James A. Forbes Jr.



The

HEALING



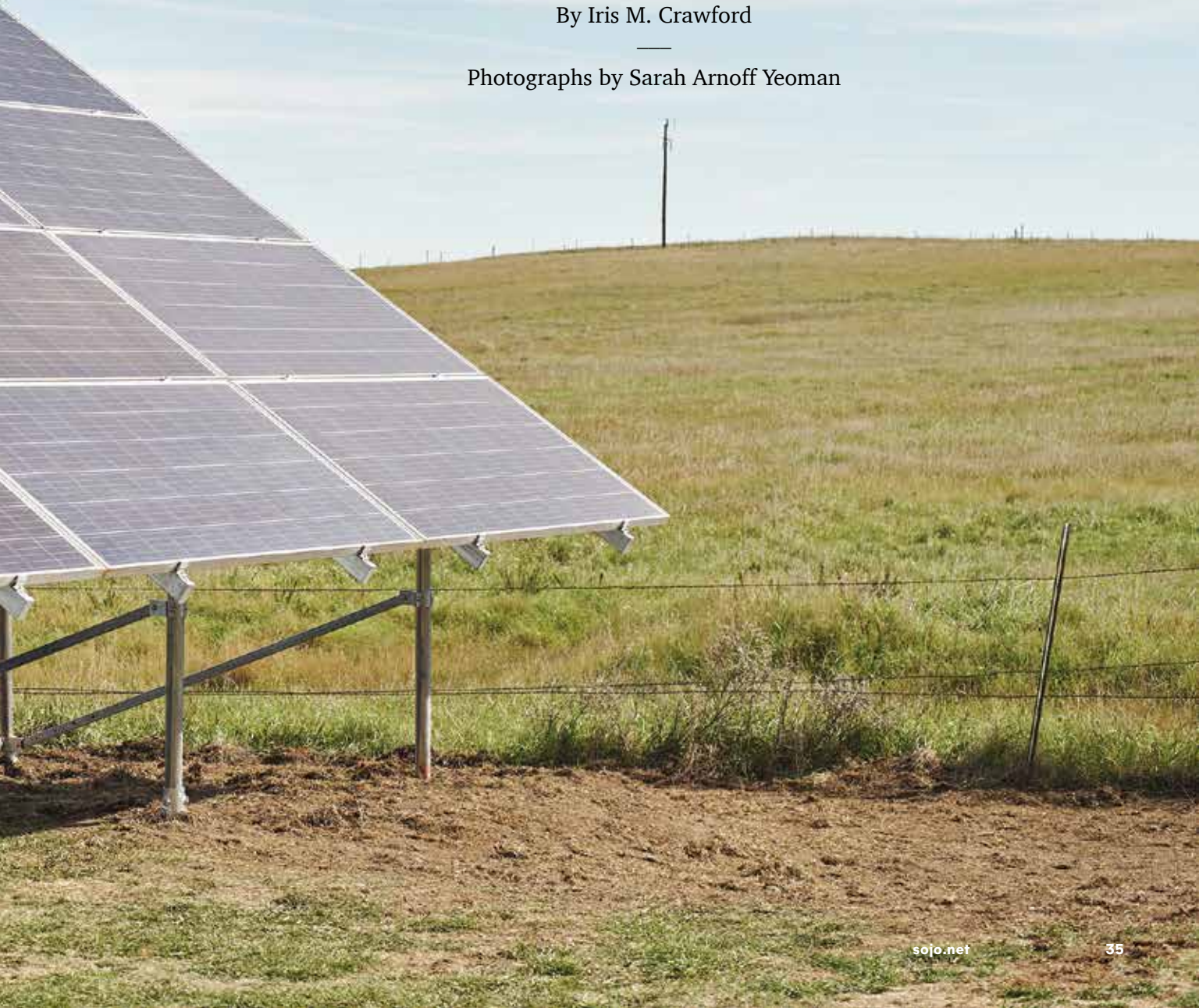
POWER

of the Sun

*Indigenous nations find hope and solidarity
in solar energy.*

By Iris M. Crawford

Photographs by Sarah Arnoff Yeoman



I

In 1876, Lakota Sioux rode on horseback from South Dakota to Montana Territory to help the Northern Cheyenne at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in one of the most important actions of the Great Sioux War.

The battle was inevitable.

The rights promised through the Second Treaty of Fort Laramie, which gave the Sioux and Arapaho possession of the Dakota Territory, were being ignored. White miners had come to settle on part of the land that was sacred to the Lakota Sioux. The U.S. government ordered the Indigenous communities to return to their designated reservations. Instead of complying, they banded together as an act of resistance. Led by Lakota Sioux Chief Sitting Bull, the Indigenous resistance grew several thousand in number and ultimately defeated Lt. Colonel George Custer and the 7th Cavalry—one of the worst U.S. army defeats during the Plains Wars.

Nearly 150 years later, members of the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne have joined forces once again to defend themselves against a new threat to their communal life: fossil fuels.

Chéri Smith, a descendant of the Mi'kmaq Nation of Northern Maine and the Canadian Maritimes, learned about the Northern Cheyenne nation's long battle with Arch Coal, which in the 1970s began attempts to control the nation's mineral rights. The 440,000-acre Northern Cheyenne reservation sits atop the largest remaining seam of low-sulfur, strip-minable coal in the country, Smith said. Arch Coal sought to mine 1.3 billion pounds of coal from Otter Creek, which runs through Northern Cheyenne territory, to export to Asian markets. The coal company's plan was to carve a swath from the Northern Cheyenne reservation all the way to the Lummi Nation's homeland in Washington state, just south of the U.S.-Canada border, Smith said.

The long struggle with Arch Coal inspired Smith to found the Covenant Tribal Solar Initiative, recently relaunched as the Indigenized Energy Initiative (IEI), where she is now CEO.

Otto Braided Hair Jr. and his daughter Vanessa Braided Hair founded ecoCheyenne in 2012 to raise awareness of the potential ramifications of Arch Coal establishing a coal mine on the reservation. Through their grassroots efforts and help from numerous volunteers, they educated and informed tribal members about the dangers of fossil fuels. Despite multiple attempts by Arch Coal, the nation members fought to keep the coal in the ground, vowing to protect their land. In 2016, the tribe passed several resolutions that paved the way for renewable energy and prompted Arch Coal to withdraw from the 40-year battle.

The preexisting partnership between the Northern Cheyenne and the Sioux was strengthened by the Dakota Access Pipeline protests that brought together tribes across the country to stop construction on the 1,772-mile underground oil pipeline. Their work eventually led to the formation of a formalized team of solar experts, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who were focused on bolstering the empowerment of Indigenous peoples of



the Great Plains through solar energy. Today, Indigenized Energy is building a self-sufficient green workforce and creating a new kind of Indigenous sovereignty.

Led by Smith and in collaboration with SolarCity, which is now Tesla Solar, the Northern Cheyenne nation completed its first solar panel demonstration on the home of tribal member Elsie WeaselBear. Smith said that WeaselBear, despite being an elder and largely unfamiliar with the technology, accepted the system being installed on her home. “She marched her little self into the tribal capital chambers with her electric bill the first month that the solar system had been fully operational,” Smith said. Before the installation of the solar panels, WeaselBear’s monthly electric bill had been close to \$600. After the solar panel installation, her bill dropped to \$32. According to Smith, this helped the council see solar power’s potential and convinced the body to fully support projects across the reservation.

‘A NEW WAY OF LIFE THAT HONORS THE OLD’

When European settlers first came to North America, Indigenous people taught them how to live on the unfamiliar land, grow food, and build homes, said Cody Two Bears, a co-founder of IEI and a well-known #NoDAPL (No Dakota Access Pipeline) movement activist. “When [European settlers] didn’t need us anymore, the thought was to divide and conquer [the Indigenous peoples].”



In many instances in American history, Two Bears said, settlers drove Indigenous peoples from their land, which prevented them from preserving and practicing their land-sustaining rituals. Today, amid intensifying natural disasters, extreme heat, and sea-level rise, the Western world is turning back to Indigenous knowledge, recognizing that it is those who have tended to the earth the longest who “understand what it takes to live here and take care of this land,” Two Bears said.

When Two Bears was 26, he became the youngest person ever elected to the tribal council of the Standing Rock Sioux. After being a central voice in the #NoDAPL protest, Two Bears, now 37, saw a new path forward with solar energy and IEI. By the end of 2017, Two Bears had initiated the effort to develop solar on Standing Rock Sioux land and had successfully sought donations to develop the largest—300 kilowatts—solar farm in the state of North Dakota, just three miles from the Dakota Access Pipeline. Combining cutting-edge science and technology with Indigenous customs is how we “learn a new way of life that honors the old way,” said Two Bears, paraphrasing advisory board member Chief Henry Red Cloud. Two Bears said that relaunching the organization as the Indigenized Energy Initiative “better represents who we are: Indigenous people taking back our power.”

*If humans believe
they can dominate
and exploit energy,
our relationship
with energy will
remain broken.*

Dr. David Riley came to the effort while he was on the faculty of Penn State University, experimenting with alternative building methods. He had been approached by the nonprofit Red Feather Development Group, based in Washington state, which expressed interest in housing strategies that would be suitable for Indigenous communities. Many of the members Riley and the nonprofit worked with lived in housing provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The homes were built to be economical but not very energy efficient. Tribal community members “ended up spending hundreds of dollars on high energy costs,” Riley said.

In the early days, Riley explained, the homes were made by hand, but in later years the homes became modular. The nonprofit experimented with straw-bale construction, which can provide good insulation and structural support, and was ultimately able to build six homes and community buildings. Toward the end of those projects, solar power was starting to be incorporated in building designs.

Riley worked on demonstration projects on three reservations with Red Feather. “That was about when I realized that moving from one reservation to the next every year wasn’t really going to accomplish much,” he said. His third and final project was with the Northern Cheyenne reservation. In 2000, the Northern Cheyenne nation invited the group to develop a more long-term relationship. Now, Riley is a part of IEI’s core team, focusing on strategic planning and partnerships to secure funding for the development of solar projects.

Riley admits that, early in his career, he was not dialed into the ecological impacts of buildings and construction. But working with Red Feather helped him understand the potential for solar energy. He saw the prices of solar panels drop due to more efficient technology and better financing mechanisms and learned about the need to have a new kind of electric grid as our reliance on fossil fuels becomes increasingly unsustainable. As energy demand rose nationally due to urbanization, population growth, and industrial activity, “it was evident that solar was going to cross the line and be the most cost-effective way to go,” said Riley. But as technology advanced, education on its benefits didn’t. “That’s where, as a teacher, I felt like I could contribute,” said Riley.

In 2021, the Indigenized Energy Initiative embarked on two groundbreaking solar installation demonstrations projects. The first, a 10-kilowatt solar system, began in June 2021 on the Northern Cheyenne reservation at the Muddy Hall community building. The second started in September 2021 at the family home of four Standing Rock tribal elders. Participants at both demonstrations received multiple days of training that included learning system design, installation management, safety, and more. IEI invited community members to the demonstration and offered full support, such as compensating participants if they took time off work to



take part in the solar demonstration. Some community members were ultimately hired by IEI to serve as solar representatives in their own communities, helping to maintain systems and educating community members on the benefits of solar power. Others were hired by other solar companies within the region.

Solar projects look different depending upon the tribe's needs. Some tribes may be looking to develop a large-scale solar farm where excess energy could be sold to a utility company as a revenue stream for the reservation. Others are focused on providing solar energy to individual homes and buildings to help lower energy costs. Regardless, many community members are starting to see how vulnerable their current energy infrastructure is as climate change spurs hurricanes, winter storms, and sea-level rise. Solar provides a source of emergency power in these situations, which is of critical concern to health care centers and hospitals.

The new federal infrastructure bill enacted last fall has made a significant amount of funding available to Indigenous communities looking to enter the renewable energy space. IEI is helping the Indigenous community take full advantage of the \$11 billion earmarked for infrastructure projects in Indigenous communities. For the ongoing White River Community Solar Project, for instance, the Department of Energy will match all donations up to \$400,000.

A REJUVENATION OF IDENTITY

Indigenized Energy advisory board member Chief Henry Red Cloud is a pioneer in solar energy on the Oglala Lakota Nation reservation. Two Bears describes Red Cloud as “the OG of solar,” as he has been training people and leading solar demonstration projects for more than 20 years. IEI has an active partnership with Red Cloud’s nonprofit, Red Cloud Renewable. Red Cloud calls trainees “solar warriors,” as some of them have an uphill battle in advocating for solar in their community. What’s powerful about these warriors, Riley said, “is that it is a community of individuals who’ve realized there’s a real opportunity

there.” The organization is also exploring other forms of renewable energy, including wind. “We’ve advised tribes on some proposed wind projects and absolutely have the capabilities,” Riley said.

But the main goal of IEI is to help tribes develop financially vibrant economic systems through renewable energy. Riley envisions a revolving fund where tribes would accumulate revenue that would then go back into building more renewable energy projects. In addition, Riley sees using philanthropic dollars to help further investments in solar and expand Indigenous resources to maintain their own projects.

The Midwest and the Great Plains face harsh weather conditions, and reservations tend to be in very remote areas. “[In the past, one of the few] options for having economic opportunity was to buy into fossil fuels,” Daniel East, a co-creator of IEI, explained. The renewable energy space is not exempt from capitalistic greed and extraction. “In the corporate solar industry world, there is an urgency to install as many kilowatts as possible in order to make the most money,” East said. Despite solar being a renewable energy source, exploitation and monopolization can still happen. IEI is pushing to help tribes find their own economies of scale. “Growth comes from creating thoughtful ways of approach to help [tribes] realize their visions for how they want to approach this work,” East said. In all of this, there is an opportunity for healing and independence. Even more important, there is room for the rejuvenation of identity.

East talked about the Indigenous belief that energy—one of the largest industries on the planet and one of the biggest contributors to environmental harm—is linked to the same energy or spirit in all living beings. If humans believe they can dominate and exploit that energy, our relationship with energy will remain broken. “I believe that finding the right relationship to energy is not only healing for these tribes, but it’s healing for everyone,” East said.

Exploitative industries have been putting pressure on marginalized communities for centuries. “Our focus is on what comes next,” Smith said. The Indigenized Energy Initiative seeks to work with Indigenous nations to develop the tools and the skills needed to break free from historical constraints such as discriminatory energy pricing and replace it with “self-determination.”

“Having an economy based on things that are actually in line with our Native ethos and value systems and can employ Native people is how we break free and truly become sovereign again,” Smith said. “All of that leads to a restoration of self-reliance and hope.” ❖

Iris M. Crawford is a Boston-based climate journalist, organizer, poet, and current master’s student at MIT studying science writing.

POET ALINE MELLO POURS INTO VERSE HER LIFE AS AN UNDOCUMENTED WOMAN WRESTLING WITH RACE, FAITH AFTER DISILLUSIONMENT, AND THE IN-BETWEEN EXISTENCE OF AN IMMIGRANT.

By Liuan Huska

Interview



A

Aline Mello was 7 years old when she left Brazil with her parents and sister for what was supposed to be a short-term stay in the United States. Growing

up undocumented, Mello turned to writing to process her questions about belonging and relationships. *More Salt than Diamond* (Andrews McMeel Publishing), her debut poetry collection, pulses with themes of identity, religion, and living as an immigrant in tumultuous times. *Sojourners* columnist Liuan Huska spoke with Mello, a graduate fellow in creative writing at Ohio State University, about race, language, and coming back around to God after disillusionment with the church.

Salt Water

By Aline Mello

You will be at the beach,
 laboring your heels into the sand.

Your mother will talk about her father,
 how he'd cook her carne de sol when she'd visit.

You will ask, "Was it worth it? Immigrating?"

She will say things aren't as good back home.
 We recreate our homeland in our minds.

She'll tell you it wasn't a mistake.

Squinting in the sunlight, you will wonder
 what part ocean, what part sweat, and
 what part tears is the salt on your tongue.

Livian Huska: What were the circumstances of your family's emigration from Brazil?

Aline Mello: We emigrated in 1997. We were pretty poor. We had a lot of faith that if we were going to the U.S., it was because God wanted us to go. My uncle got a tourist visa for the four of us to go to Somerville, Mass. It was just going to be three years.

My father had this thing where he would follow charismatic pastors, and we followed one to Atlanta in 2000, right before 9/11. I had been told [incorrectly], "If you stay here for 10 years, you automatically get papers." I thought, "Okay, I'm going to be fine."

Right when I graduated high school, in 2007, my father left us. My mom literally got home from work one day and got a voice mail from him saying, "Hey, I left the country." I realized I couldn't go to college in Brazil because I didn't know college-level Portuguese. And I had scholarships here. The goal was to go to college and then go back. Then DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] happened. So I thought, "Obviously, God wants me to stay." You keep getting scraps enough [that] you don't starve.

What do you mean by "getting scraps"? I grew up in Brazilian church through when I was 17. I was one of the true believers. I didn't date. I followed all the rules. I would give myself *extra* rules. It was the whole concept of "less of me, more of You." Trying to remove any trace of self and personality. With being undocumented, it felt like,

**"I DON'T THINK MY
 BODY CAN HOLD ONTO
 TWO COUNTRIES-
 WORTH OF POLITICS."**

"As soon as I learn the [spiritual] lesson, God's going to change my circumstance."

How have you renegotiated your relationship with God since then? When Donald Trump started his campaign, I started telling people about my immigration status. Living in Georgia, in the South, I saw people supporting Trump. I figured, "People just don't know, and as soon as they know they'll change their minds."

I was devastated when he won. I felt like I had personally failed. I didn't convince enough people. For a long time, I thought, "Maybe God is a Republican. Maybe God doesn't want immigrants. Maybe God is a white man. Maybe this is it."

That's terrifying. It was so heartbreaking. I tried to pare my faith down to Jesus. There was no way Jesus would not be affirming of LGBTQ people. I cannot imagine Jesus walking around looking at marginalized groups and further marginalizing them. It's only been for the past year that I feel I'm in a safe enough space to realize that maybe I do believe in God. But I only refer to God as a "she" in therapy.

I hate the idea that you do all these things [to self-sacrifice], and God says, "Ew, dirty rags." If God is really good, God is saying, "Aline, I see all that you've done; they're not dirty rags. I keep them; they're all valuable. But you don't have to do any more. I want you to be yourself and enjoy your life."

Brazil's national elections will be in October, and President Jair Bolsonaro, who is running for another term, is deploying some tactics used by Trump, such as claiming the voting system is vulnerable to fraud. What similarities do you see between Brazil and the U.S.? I don't think my body can hold onto two countries-worth of politics. But the law is that all Brazilians must vote, or you pay a fine. I'm going to vote for Lula [Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, currently Bolsonaro's leading opponent]. I'm considered a white Brazilian, and I'm very aware of the power I have when I'm in Brazil. I need to do what I'd like white Americans to do, or else I'm a hypocrite.

You're brown in the U.S., but white in Brazil? It's strange. There's a poem in my book about when *cont'd on page 45*



EMBRACING THE ANIMAL WITHIN

By Abby Olcese

Meilin Lee, the 13-year-old hero of Pixar's *Turning Red*, has a lot on her shoulders. She's maintaining perfect grades alongside responsibilities helping her mom, Ming (Sandra Oh), run Toronto's oldest Chinese temple. She's torn between her identities as a dutiful daughter and a socially active teenager. Oh, and she transforms into a giant red panda in times of strong emotion.

That last issue, it turns out, is genetic. Because of a deal made by an ancestor, the women of Meilin's family all poof into red pandas when they're angry, sad, or excited, a trait that emerges during puberty. The panda spirit can be contained through a ritual. Ming is desperate to keep her daughter's red panda spirit under control. Meilin, however, isn't sure she wants it subdued.

Directed and co-written by Chinese Canadian animator Domee Shi, *Turning Red's* fuzzy transfiguration is a metaphor for real-life stressors. There's the embarrassing physical shift into adulthood, the identity crisis that comes with being the child of immigrants, performance anxiety, and hereditary tendencies.

Meilin and her female relatives' transformations stand for each of these truths at different points. With Meilin and Ming especially, the red panda represents the messy parts of our personalities that we try to conceal, for fear that we'll be judged at our worst.

Meilin and her family's journey to self-acceptance opens the door for us to consider how God's love encourages compassion toward ourselves and others. As Paul writes in 2 Timothy, "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and

of self-discipline." It can take a lifetime of learning to properly nurture what Mary Oliver, in her poem "Wild Geese," calls "the soft animal of your body." We are not perfect, but we are always loved, and that knowledge can give us courage.

When Meilin discovers her red panda spirit, she's horrified, and that fear initially makes her panda spirit destructive. As she learns to control it, Meilin's panda becomes a source of joy and confidence. This is contrasted with Ming's long-repressed panda, which becomes a Godzilla-sized rage monster. In both cases, Meilin and Ming's red pandas are expressions of vulnerability. Over time, they realize their inner creatures (just like our own less-furry inner selves) need to be cared for, not suppressed.

Turning Red is a sweet, relatable reminder that everyone's lives contain emotional balancing acts. It also makes the extraordinarily kind observation that perhaps we shouldn't always work so hard to keep ourselves under control. By relying on familial, social, and spiritual support systems, and recognizing how much we are loved, we can be better at loving ourselves. ✦

Abby Olcese (@abbyolcese) is a freelance film critic and writer based in Kansas.

From *Turning Red*

BIASED HISTORY

Wanting to understand the enduring power of the myth of the Confederate "Lost Cause," comedian CJ Hunt expanded what was originally a satirical internet video into an insightful documentary. Set against the New Orleans City Council's 2015 vote to take down four Confederate monuments, *The Neutral Ground* explores hard truths of our nation's past.

ITVS



Care Work

In *Essential Labor: Mothering as Social Change*, writer Angela Garbes weaves social analysis and personal experience as a first-generation Filipina American to expand our understanding of caregiving in the U.S. and offer a revolutionary view of the future of family life.

Harper Wave



Reclamation

Gregory D. Smithers' *Reclaiming Two-Spirits: Sexuality, Spiritual Renewal, and Sovereignty in Native America* illuminates the history of Indigenous North Americans who embodied both the masculine and feminine before colonizers arrived. Smithers traces Indigenous resistance to centuries of gendered colonial violence.

Beacon Press

DON'T LOOK AWAY

By Faith-Marie
Zamblé

I DIDN'T WANT WRY LYRICS.
I WANTED A BATTLE CRY.



Curated

“Do not look away. Do not avert your gaze. Do not turn aside.” These words met me a few weeks ago via ecologist Joanna Macy’s ever-relevant book *World as Lover, World as Self*. I love these words, even though their charge

is not an easy one. Looking at what *is*, without turning away, without aversion, takes incredible strength of will, especially in a culture that banks on our inability to pay attention or handle despair. Nonetheless, for Macy, the illumination of sustainable futures is impossible without first facing our grief. Which brings me, in an extremely roundabout way, to Jane Campion’s film *The Power of the Dog* and Lorde’s 2021 album *Solar Power*.

The Power of the Dog is based on a 1967 book of the same name and follows the complex relationship between two rancher brothers—the cruel older one and the other, victimized by this cruelty. When the younger brother gets married, the film becomes a study in psychological distress, told in close-ups and uneasy strings. Phil, the eldest, may be a sadist who takes pleasure in humiliating others, but his sadism stems from an inability to truly look at and accept himself and his own desires. He runs from his grief; he looks away; he averts his gaze from his own heart. In the end, his fear costs him dearly. There are limits, it seems, to what can be illuminated, to what we can bear to bring to light.

In Lorde’s *Solar Power*, on the other hand, everything is coming up salty skin, Céline designer wear, and sun kisses. Moving on from the baroque, well, drama of her previous album, *Melodrama*, *Solar Power* shines by virtue of its simul-

taneous investment in and detachment from star power. Lorde sheds her status as pop culture prophet to say that couture notwithstanding, perhaps the best things in life can’t be owned: the feeling of being with someone you love, ocean sparkles, the joys of a “blue day.”

When I first heard the album, my initial response was ambivalence. Where was the chaos? Where were the sharp edges? I didn’t want wry lyrics. I wanted a battle cry. Now my tune, as it were, has changed. It’s too easy to see Macy’s call to radical attention, borrowed from her Buddhist practice, as an exhortation to immerse the spirit in life’s uglier facets. Making peace with Lorde’s album was a way of making peace with the fact that life doesn’t always have to be hard. Suffering is not the only thing there is to see. Not turning aside also applies to that which makes our souls spark with gratitude.

Strange bedfellows though they are, there’s something compelling about *Solar Power* and *The Power of the Dog* sitting side by side. When I consider these pieces, I think about revelation, of what can only be revealed through time, like the nature of Phil’s longings or the wisdom Lorde collected in the four-year period between *Melodrama* and *Solar Power*. Look away and you’ll miss it: joy, sorrow, despair, and the sun that gazes over us all. ✨

Faith-Marie Zamblé is an artist, writer, and M.F.A. candidate in dramaturgy and dramatic criticism at the Yale School of Drama. This is her final “Curated” column (for now).



**"EVEN IN SONG, WE BECOME
FLUENT IN THE LANGUAGE
OF OUR COLONIZERS."**

become fluent in the language of our colonizers. Our English, impeccable. Our mother tongues, if we were taught them at all, become atrophied muscles, half-remembered melodies."

At home, where they are called by their names, their families try to mold them into "good girls" who do not talk back. Visibility remains elusive. But when the brown girls check in with each other, the novel transcends the theme of voicelessness—because they celebrate one another. They envy and mourn. They honor their streets and remember the brown boys they desire but were told to avoid. They explore various identities, sexualities, and gender orientations. Some give in to expectations to survive. By making space for their multiplicities and contradictions, the chorus evokes a kind of call-and-response, a subconscious stream of communication between who the brown girls once were and who they become.

A challenge of the chorus can be the loss of individuality, but *Brown Girls* questions the American impulse to prioritize the individual over the collective. The specificity of Queens also grounds the novel. By centering a place where immigrants of many nationalities and backgrounds converged, Andreades' brown girls show us what they lose to systemic racism, the prison-industrial complex,

gentrification. There are references to life before Sept. 11, the Trump presidency, and the coronavirus pandemic, events that have marked the coming-of-age of American millennials. By distinguishing these brown girls from those outside Queens, Andreades further demonstrates that brown girlhood is not a monolith.

From childhood to motherhood to the afterlife, the brown girls exist between worlds. Still, no matter how far they go, they are bound to Queens. When they visit their respective motherlands (or fatherlands) as adults, they are struck by how they blend in but remain obviously foreign. Here, they wonder what makes them "American"? Is it their hormone-fed bodies? Their weak stomachs? Is it the fact that some of them can speak only English? They reflect on the dreams that took their parents away from home and realize that leaving is in their blood. "But perhaps," they add, "it is also in our blood to return." This is a novel about the many ways we return—in flesh, in memory, in spirit—to the places and people who made us. ♦

Elinam Agbo earned an M.F.A. from the University of Michigan Helen Zell Writers' Program. Born in Ghana, she grew up in the U.S. Midwest.

VOICES RECLAIMED

Brown Girls,
by Daphne Palasi Andreades
Random House

Whisper networks. The Greek muses. Immigrant aunties. Women, in groups, are loud and gripping storytellers. Daphne Palasi Andreades' debut *Brown Girls* confirms this. In eight immersive sections, the novel chronicles the coming-of-age of the titular brown girls, mainly second-generation immigrants raised in the "dregs of Queens" (N.Y.). With the first-person plural narration, we follow a chorus that aims to reclaim the voices they lost at various junctures in their lives. After all, what demands a shout if not systemic silence?

The brown girls experience erasure early. Their teachers mistake Michaela for Naz, Nadira for Anjali. They snap at Sophie who is Filipino, but call her Mae, who is Chinese. To mold themselves into girls who are worthy of visibility, the brown girls begin to erase themselves. They lighten their skin. They quiet their rage. After middle school, education takes some of them away from Queens. They wrestle with the changes it brings. "Dutifully, we reposition our tongues," they tell us. "Even in song, we

FINDING THE FREEDOM TO FLOURISH

All the White Friends I Couldn't Keep:
Hope—and Hard Pills to Swallow—
About Fighting for Black Lives,
by Andre Henry

Convergent Books



A

Austin Channing Brown, author of *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*, posted once that she didn't need "more friends" but rather wanted "partners in the struggle for justice."

As a white Midwesterner, I'd thought of racial injustice as an individual problem—individuals not liking other individuals who didn't look like them. Therefore, the answer to racism was friendship. I worked at churches that celebrated calls to the common table in worship, absent confession or repentance, to sanctify my individualistic take on race. Brown's words shook me—this activist wants co-laborers, not friends? What even *is* the work if it's not friendship?

While Andre Henry is Black and grew up in the South, he and I were raised on the same milk of individualistic race relations. In his debut book, *All the White Friends I Couldn't Keep*, Henry narrates his journey out of the "colorblind" evangelicalism of his childhood to being an artist, activist, and community organizer for systemic racial justice.

Henry's guide to systemic justice is deeply personal. He illustrates how his growing awareness of his own captivity in white supremacist systems alienated him from many white persons he had called friend, family, even pastor. A white family with whom he grew up and often shared holiday meals passively stood by as an in-law spouted racist rhetoric about a police shooting of a Black man. A white friend in seminary confessed to Henry that he could not "categorically condemn slavery, because some slaves might have had a positive experience."

I resonated with how much of myself I saw in these white friends. But Henry also weaves insights from activists, theologians, and sociologists to expose the racist logic operating behind the curtain. Those familiar with Henry's newsletter or podcast will recognize his pithy, provocative ability to make abstract theories accessible.

Reactions to incidents of racial injustice often begin and end with fleeting outrage. In the wake of George Floyd's

murder in 2020, anti-racism books soared to the top of the bestseller lists. Most of that anger evaporated in the following months (or, as Henry charts in one chapter, was tamped down by authoritarian responses). Henry imagines a different path, one where we refuse to let our anger distract from seeing how white supremacy operates at a systemic level. One where our outrage mobilizes us to put our bodies into the *ongoing* fight for freedom.

As an aspiring ally, I am not Henry's primary audience. While I learned much from the book, Henry writes first for people of color, those who most directly experience the pain of white supremacy. In that, I hope readers find themselves inspired by Henry's vision for Black liberation.

Friendship couldn't have saved George Floyd. Or Michael Brown. Or Sandra Bland. Or Philando Castille—the man whose murder proved to be Henry's own apocalyptic catalyst. And anger can't sustain a movement. In the end, Henry delivers what he calls an apocalypse—a revelation of not just freedom from oppression but freedom for dancing. Creating. Loving. A freedom to flourish. Delivered by another, this vision might feel foolish. But he teaches readers language, strategies, and habits of nonviolent resistance, charting a course to become different people. Liberated. Free. And one might even say, saved. ♦

JR. Forasteros pastors Catalyst Church in Dallas, co-hosts the Fascinating Podcast, and wrote *Empathy for the Devil: Finding Ourselves in the Villains of the Bible*.



cont'd from page 40 I had to tell my mom that she wasn't white. For older Brazilians who move here, it's a more jarring thing. But for me, since I grew up brown, I'm constantly aware of my marginalization—brown, immigrant, woman, undocumented. In Brazil, I have to do a reset and remind myself I'm white there.

I grew up around Latinos who were Spanish speaking. I speak Spanish because I studied it, but it's not my first language. I want my Mexican friends to also know stuff in Portuguese. I've always had to navigate—"I'm one of you, but not one of you." It's messy because of whiteness.

Do you write poems in Portuguese? Everything I've ever written in Portuguese has been religious. I have always read the Bible in Portuguese. I used to write Portuguese psalms and sermons. It's almost like I associate Portuguese with religion and English with worldliness. Especially because becoming "Americanized," in a lot of the Brazilian church's perspective, is to become further from God. I'm trying to write my first Portuguese poem right now. I'm sure there's something there to be unlocked.

I love your poem "In the Reunion of All My Selves." I relate to the longing for wholeness and feeling of fragmentation, especially the line, "the women who are me do not ask each other questions." Do your separate selves ever come together? Very few times. The last time, I was meeting with my classmates here in Columbus [Ohio]. We went to someone's house; at first I was feeling cautious. Five of us were sitting around a table eating a big salad with purple cabbage, avocado, and eggs, talking about our lives and what brought us to writing. Looking back, I realized that I was not aware of myself at all. I was just in the moment. ❖

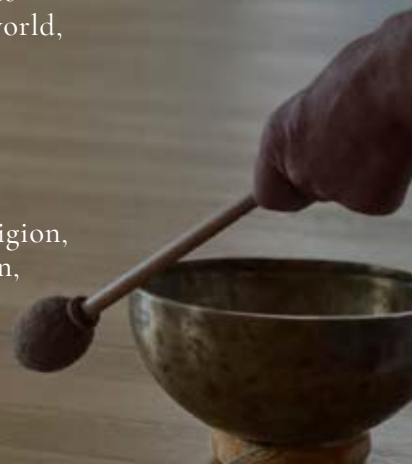
Liuan Huska is a freelance journalist and the author of *Hurting Yet Whole: Reconciling Body and Spirit in Chronic Pain and Illness*.



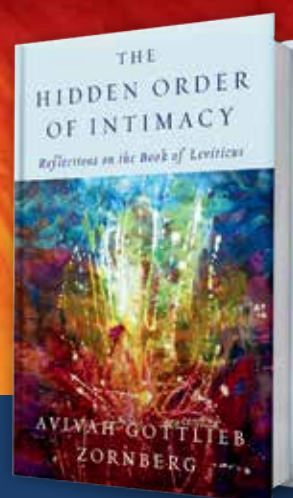
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SCHOCKEN

MERCY SEAT

By Devon Balwit



The chickens have a meanness I cannot quell
 though I thunder from the kitchen window, a god
 of rice and oats. No matter how much I scatter
 in the cardinal directions, there is bullying,
 the Silver Laced Wyandottes the worst despite their name.
 I would drown their wickedness if I could open
 the floodgates, but I hate the victims just as much
 for taking the abuse. They have all they need for parity
 along with an urge to bloody. The smallest fought the flock
 and won, but only once. Perhaps she has no stomach
 for a daily reassertion of dominance. Now she gleans
 at the margins and rebuffs all intervention. What good is it
 to look down on the world if I cannot change it?
 Indeed, creation seems to flee my very shadow.

Devon Balwit, author of *Dog-Walking in the Shadow of Pyongyang*, lives in Portland, Ore.

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CARRYING THE GOOD NEWS

Scripture passages are
from the Revised Common
Lectionary, Cycle C

By T. Denise Anderson



Living the Word

The month of June will require spiritual caregivers to take note of tensions. We begin with the celebration of Pentecost, known as the “birthday of the church,” which will undoubtedly be

a day of great joy for the faithful. But later in the month, we mark the grim anniversaries of shootings at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C., and Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Fla. We will celebrate people who father, and we will wrestle with complicated feelings about the fathers in some of our lives (and even contend with heteropatriarchy in our structures and theology). And we will celebrate the Juneteenth holiday while this nation still incarcerates Black bodies at disproportionate rates and refuses federal protections against voter suppression.

Pentecost invites the church to consider our Spirit-given power to share the gospel, speak with authority to all corners of the earth, and set the captives among us free. It may be that we find ourselves working for equity and liberation harder than we ever have before, and a pandemic has only exacerbated our fatigue. But hopefully this will be an opportunity to go back to the well of the Spirit and draw nourishment for our continued journey. We are not alone, and no one is expected to single-handedly carry the work. The same power that increased the church’s number by 3,000 on its first day is still with us. This, siblings, is good news, because we will need that power for the work we still must do.

T. Denise Anderson is acting director of Racial Equity and Women’s Intercultural Ministries at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and lives in Louisville, Ky.

**AS THE PSALMIST REMINDS US,
GOD’S MAJESTY CAN BE SEEN
IN ALL CREATION.**

JUNE 5

A COMMON TONGUE?

ACTS 2:1-21; PSALM 104:24-35;
ROMANS 8:14-17; JOHN 14:8-17, 25-27

Pentecost is often framed as a “reversal of Babel.” We read the Genesis 11 story and conclude that God was displeased upon seeing the tower humans built. The text, however, is silent on how God felt. We only know that God dispersed humans and confused their language. We could ask, if God were displeased, then is human diversity an output of God’s displeasure? Is diversity a burden to be overcome by segregating or homogenizing ourselves? This is the dangerous conclusion South African Dutch Reformed minister J.D. du Toit and other Christians reached when they used Genesis 11 to make biblical arguments in favor of apartheid laws. How we read the text matters. What if God were actually impressed by the work humans had done, but the humans abandoned the building project because God was laying before them more challenging work?

Acts 2 describes a scene in which people proclaimed God’s deeds in various languages and they could all be understood. They were not flattened into a single language. The Roman Empire’s language is not named in the litany of tongues. God’s Spirit doesn’t privilege the center but reaches as far as the lands of each of these languages. I love the psalmist’s inclusion of all creation in the proclamation of God’s deeds. There are no barriers—God-made or human-made—to God’s embrace. This is what Paul wanted the Roman church to understand: We are empowered by the Spirit to become children of God, thus family to each other. Jesus promised there would be an Advocate who would come and help his disciples as he prepared to leave them in body, and this Advocate would be with them forever.

Pentecost can be understood as a reversal of Babel or as a return to it. I believe we are being invited to resume a communal project that we never should have abandoned. It might not be easier, but the Spirit shows us it is not impossible.

JUNE 12

DIFFICULT TRUTHS

PROVERBS 8:1-4, 22-31; PSALM 8;
ROMANS 5:1-5; JOHN 16:12-15

Trinity Sunday is an opportunity to examine the role God assumes in our lives and the many ways God is present with us. The wisdom discourse of Proverbs 8 anthropomorphizes wisdom as a woman. She was the first to be created and witnessed the creation of everything else. She rejoiced at creation and delighted in humanity, to whom she now calls. She desperately wants our attention. Wisdom, however, is difficult to listen to because she doesn't tell us what we want to hear. Wisdom keeps us in check when we would rather be left to our own devices. I can see why Jesus, after telling his disciples some already difficult truths before he goes to the cross, says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

The Spirit of truth enables us to absorb all that God has to say, whether it's comfortable or disturbing. We can be legitimately scared, but genuinely at peace. Paul encouraged the Roman church to boast of their hope in God, for hope often grows desperate in crisis. Hope in God allows us to be confident in those times. We are to resist the temptation to justify ourselves and look to God for that justification, which only comes by faith. As the psalmist reminds us, God's majesty can be seen in all creation, and God still esteems humanity and looks to us to care for creation. We'll need some serious help to step into such a partnership! This is the whole of trinitarian doctrine: God created us, justifies us through our faith in Jesus Christ, and constantly calls out to us, helping us to embrace truth, even when it challenges our comfort.

JUNE 19

OUR HAUNTED HISTORIES

ISAIAH 65:1-9; PSALM 22:19-28;
GALATIANS 3:23-29; LUKE 8:26-39

The **Juneteenth holiday** confronts us with our nation's shameful past and its lingering legacy. The confrontation is hardly welcome, however. "Straw man" arguments (pardon the phrase) against critical race theory are shouted from podiums at school

board meetings around the country, while opportunistic politicians take advantage of this manufactured outrage. History texts are rewritten to soften the image of America's "peculiar institution," while books that appropriately sensitize us to the realities of racialized terror are banned. Even slower than the actualization of emancipation is our willingness to reckon with the truth.

Isaiah 65 voices the anguish of a God who desperately wants to be sought out by a people who've decided they can't be bothered. After all, they're good, religious people—what do they need to change? The Gerasenes saw their neighbor liberated from tormenting demons and responded by inviting Jesus to leave. Had they forgotten the demoniac's torment? Were they ignorant of the story, or indifferent toward it? Perhaps receiving news of his liberation meant they'd have to painfully acknowledge the demons that had been among them all along. One wonders if the good folks in the Gerasene region were worried about what else was prime for upheaval once the most oppressed among them finally got free.

Juneteenth celebrations draw from the same well as the psalmist who refuses to be silent about God's salvation, irrespective of how it makes others feel. "The poor shall eat and be satisfied" (Psalm 26:6). For Paul, "there is no longer slave nor free" (Galatians 3:28), nor any contrived hierarchy that deprioritizes the cries of the afflicted. In the Black church, testimony services might include someone thanking God because they woke up "clothed and in [their] right mind." You cannot grasp the power of that statement unless you consider what it meant for the "Gerasene demoniac" and for those of us who are still tormented.

**WE ARE EMPOWERED BY THE
SPIRIT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF
GOD, THUS FAMILY TO EACH OTHER.**

JUNE 26

CROSSING INTO FREEDOM

1 KINGS 19:15-16, 19-21; PSALM 16;
GALATIANS 5:1, 13-25; LUKE 9:51-62

When Harriet Tubman made her escape from a plantation in Dorchester, Md., she described what it felt like when she realized she'd crossed the Mason-Dixon line to freedom in Pennsylvania: "When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven."

"A glory over everything"—she had a beautiful way of describing her experiences. It seems that, for Tubman, crossing that line was akin to transfiguration. She had a new understanding of what God was doing with her. I sometimes wonder about the liminality of Tubman's journey—the threshold or "between space"—and what that mixture of hope and terror must have felt like. Did she pray Psalm 16, asking for and trusting in God's protection? What strengthened her for the journey? Our texts are full of liminality amid transition.

In what were among his last prophetic acts, Elijah calls Elisha as his successor and anoints Hazael as king, as God commanded. Elisha, ignorant of all that is before him, burns his plows and roasts his oxen, leaving all behind to follow Elijah. In Luke 9:51-62, we meet Jesus after his transfiguration but before he is "taken up." So many rumors have been circulating about him—is this Elijah? The story progresses at a breakneck speed as Jesus is rejected in a Samaritan town and engages some potential followers. There's an erratic tension in all of it, and you know something big is about to happen.

Times of liminality and uncertainty often reveal who we are. Paul's admonition to the Galatian church reminds us that we're led to liberty by love of neighbor and the Spirit's guiding. On the other side of liminality is, hopefully, freedom. What new glories await us across the threshold? ✱

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.



"WHEN I NEEDED YOU MOST, WHY WERE YOU SNACKING ON FLAMIN' HOT CHEETOS?"

volleyball game nearby. So then God yelled, *I never left you! When you saw only one set of footprints, that was when I carried you.*

I was so relieved. Sorry for the mix-up, I said to God. *I also wear size 8.5, so I was confused.*

But then I noticed something even more troubling.

Okay, God, but look right there! How come there is only one set of footprints and then a bunch of Flamin' Hot Cheetos and then NO FOOTPRINTS AT ALL? When I needed you most, why were you snacking?

God sighed, in a kinda annoyed way. *That was a really bad time in your life. After a particularly messy breakup, you went to the beach with a bottle of wine and Flamin' Hot Cheetos. You started offering the seagulls the Hot Cheetos, which they were enthusiastic about at first, thinking that these were the original Cheetos or Trader Joe's Baked Cheese Crunchies. Soon, as the seagulls began to feel the salty heat on their tongues, they retaliated and began nosediving toward you. I had to mount you on my shoulders and fly us away on your beach towel. You started singing songs from Aladdin. It was, honestly, really inappropriate.*

I apologized profusely. God and I walked in silence for a bit until I noticed one final set of suspicious footprints. *Hold on now, God, there are only one set of footprints here, and I know they're not yours, because they are clearly the round, clunky shape of clogs, which I know you wouldn't be caught dead in because of your brand loyalty to Birkenstocks.*

In response, God smiled. *You're right, Jenna. Those are your shoe prints. I stepped on a jellyfish, so you actually gave me a piggyback ride. I was really grateful until you challenged some fraternity bros to a chicken fight in the ocean.* ❖

Jenna Barnett is associate culture editor, sojo.net.

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND (UNEDITED)

By Jenna Barnett

Once I had a dream that I was walking along the beach with my Lord. I felt self-conscious about wearing a two-piece swimsuit, but I didn't know the Lord was going to be at Rehoboth Beach during spring break.

God said, *Don't worry about it, Jenna. Purity culture is so 2008.*

Suddenly, scenes of my life flashed before me along the shoreline. I looked back at the footprints in the sand. In most scenes, there were two sets of footprints: Mine and God's. God is a size 8.5 and has high arches, in case you were wondering. But then I noticed something troubling. At many of the hard times in my life, there was only one set of footprints.

When I needed you the most, why did you leave me? I asked God, with more sass than I'd like to admit. God whispered something in return, but I couldn't hear the words. It's really loud at the beach, and there was a sand

CHRISTINA BARLAND EDMONDSON
& CHAD BRENNAN
FOREWORD BY KORIE LITTLE EDWARDS AND MICHAEL O. EMERSON

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